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Composite
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actable
ing gear

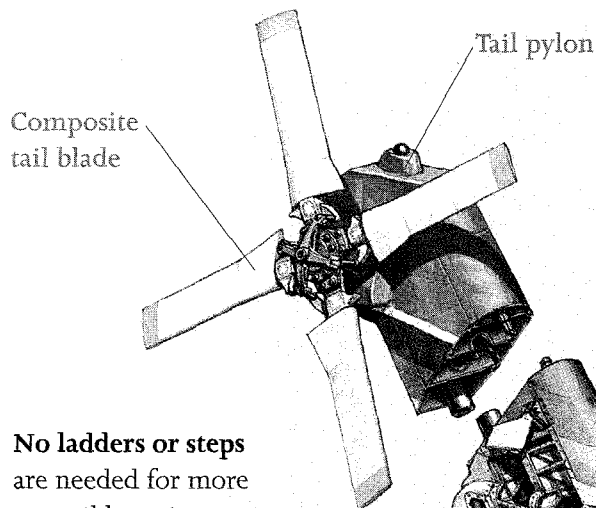
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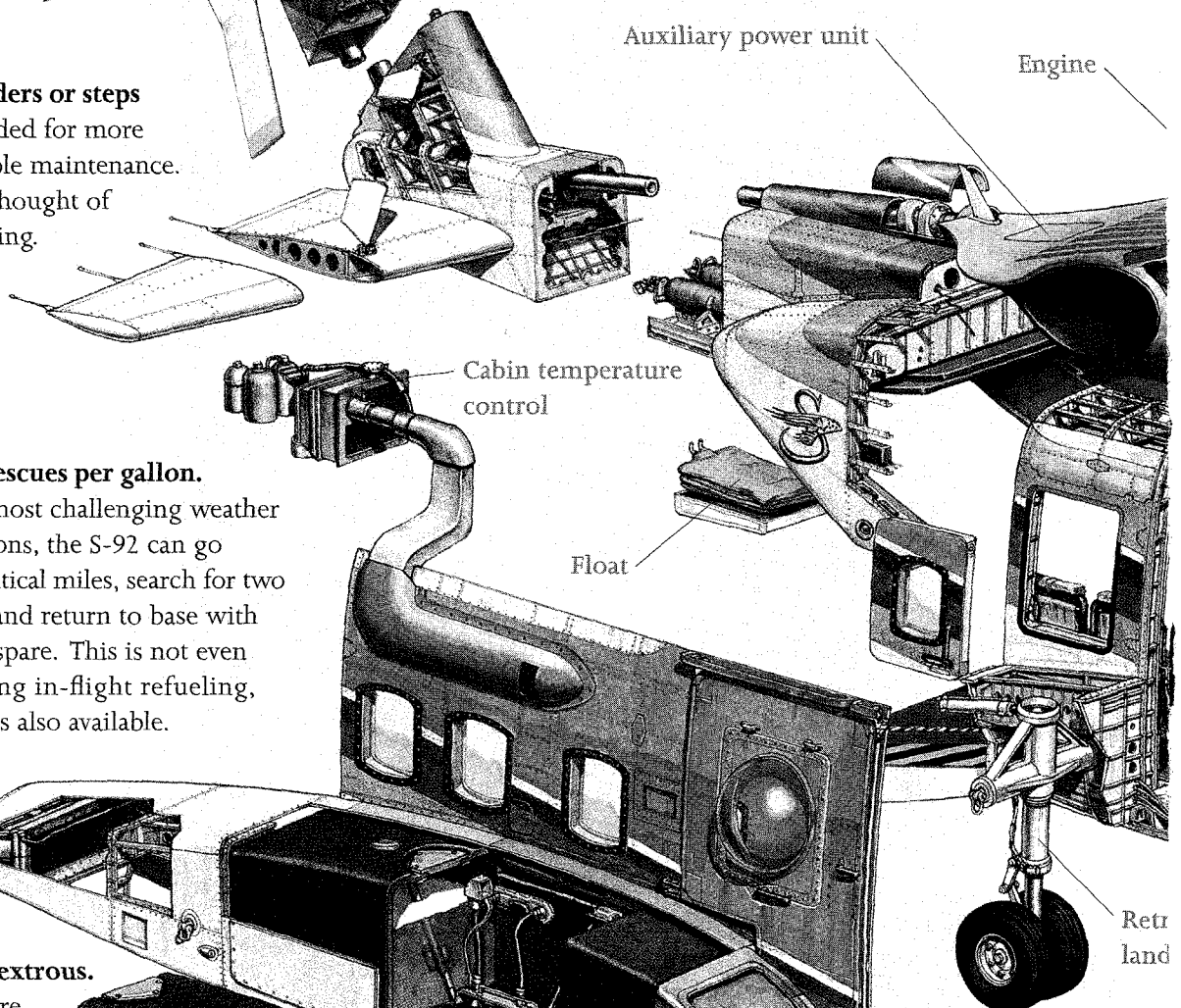
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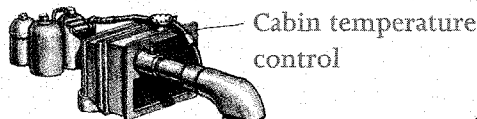


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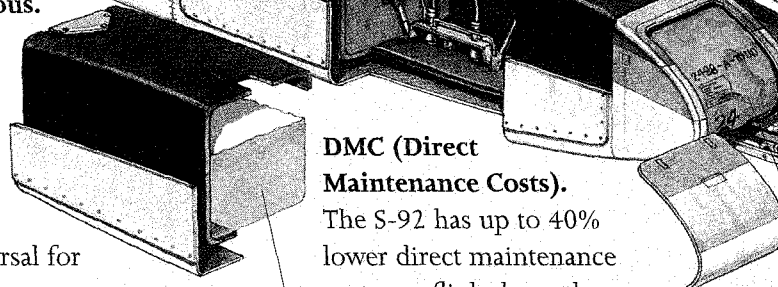


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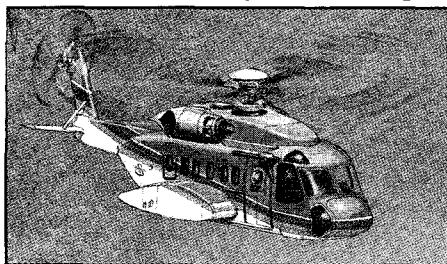
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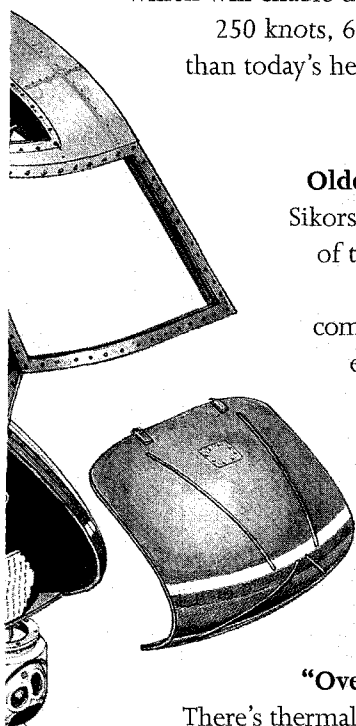


"If a man is in need of rescue,
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—Igor Sikorsky
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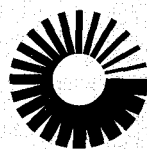
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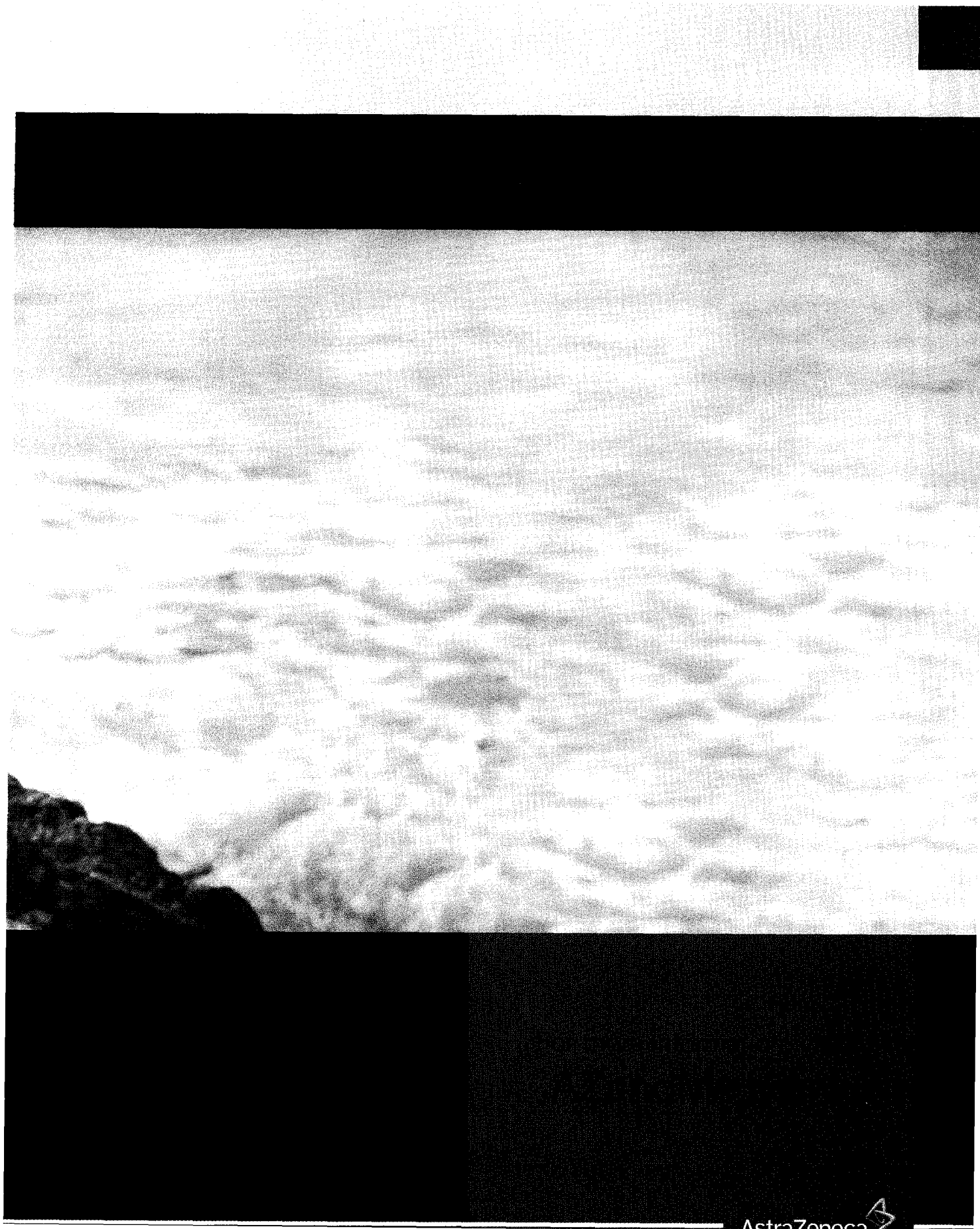
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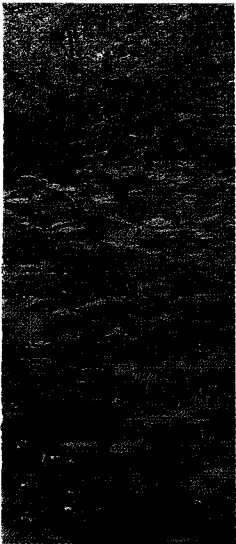
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by the parent company of Philip Morris International
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Businesses face change every day.
At Altria Group, we have encountered
our share in recent years. It's how you
respond to change and what you learn
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successful your journey will be.

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you get where you need to go.

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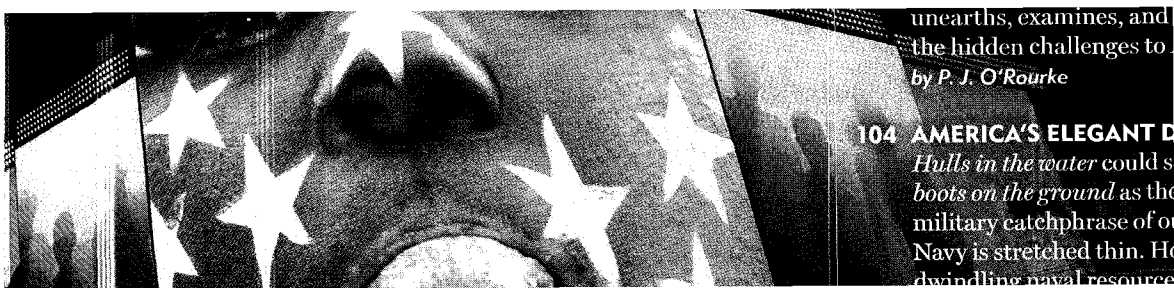
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Altria

Alibi



unearths, examines, and
the hidden challenges to
by P. J. O'Rourke

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Hulls in the water could s
boots on the ground as the
military catchphrase of o
Navy is stretched thin. Ho
dwindling naval resources

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by Joe Zeff Design, Inc.

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Bo Zaunders/Corbis

FROM THE ARCHIVES

To mark *The Atlantic's* anniversary, we have in the following pages reprinted excerpts from articles and poems by such contributors as W.E.B. DuBois, Robert Frost, Julia Ward Howe, Helen Keller, Martin Luther King Jr., Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Robert Lowell, Eleanor Roosevelt, Theodore Roosevelt, Henry David Thoreau, and Woodrow Wilson. (Read the full articles at www.theatlantic.com.)

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THE AMERICAN IDEA

Read more essays on challenges to the American idea, and submit your own online. (The best reader contributions will be published in a future issue of *The Atlantic*.)

INTERVIEW: EVERYBODY LOVES REINHOLD

Paul Elie, author of "A Man for All Reasons," discusses the contested legacy of Reinhold Niebuhr, whose mantle everyone, regardless of political orientation, wants to wear.

VIDEO: OLD MAN RIVER

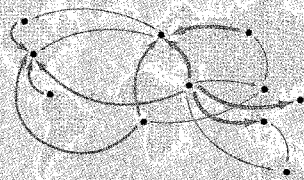
Wayne Curtis, author of this month's Travels article, shares video from his trip up the Mighty Mississippi aboard the largest steamboat ever built.

PLUS: BLOG POSTS BY ANDREW SULLIVAN, JAMES FALLOW, AND MORE

There are 193 countries in the world.
None of them are energy independent.

So who's holding whom over a barrel?

Global Oil Flows



Source: Energy Information Administration

The fact is, the vast majority of countries rely on the few energy-producing nations that won the geological lottery, blessing them with abundant hydrocarbons. And yet, even regions with plenty of raw resources import some form of energy. Saudi Arabia, for example, the world's largest oil exporter, imports refined petroleum products like gasoline.

So if energy independence is an unrealistic goal, how does everyone get the fuel they need, especially in a world of rising demand, supply disruptions, natural disasters, and unstable regimes?

True global energy security will be a result of cooperation and engagement, not isolationism. When investment and expertise are allowed to flow freely across borders, the engine of innovation is ignited, prosperity is fueled and the energy available to everyone increases. At the same time, balancing the needs of producers and consumers is as crucial as increasing supply and curbing demand. Only then will the world enjoy energy peace-of-mind.

Succeeding in securing energy for everyone doesn't have to come at the expense of anyone. Once we all start to think differently about energy, then we can truly make this promise a reality.

willyoujoinus.com

Projected Global Oil Demand

■ 2004 DEMAND
82 mbpd*

■ 2030 DEMAND
115 mbpd



Source: International Energy Agency
*million barrels per day

OBJECTIVE EFFICIENCY

	ENERGY IMPORTS BY OIL EXPORTING COUNTRIES			
	GASOLINE	ELECTRICITY	NATURAL GAS	COAL
Saudi Arabia				
Russia				
Norway				
UAE				
Nigeria				

Source: Energy Information Administration

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

- DIVERSIFY ENERGY SUPPLIES
- FIND MORE TRADITIONAL FUELS
- DEVELOP ALTERNATIVES AND RENEWABLES
- FOSTER OPEN MARKETS & TRANSPARENCY
- ENCOURAGE CONSERVATION/ENERGY EFFICIENCY

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THE FUTURE OF THE AMERICAN IDEA

On learning of plans for a new American magazine, the scholar Charles Eliot Norton wrote in June 1857 to its first editor, his friend James Russell Lowell. He wanted to offer help but also to supply an inoculating dose of reality, to caution that “such things are never permanent in our country. They burn brightly for a little while, and then burn out.” He continued, referring to the 18th-century British editor Edward Cave by his pen name, Sylvanus Urban:

It would be a great thing for us if any undertaking of this kind could live long enough to get affections and associations connected with it, whose steady glow should take the place of, and more than supply, the shine of novelty, and the dazzle of a first go-off. I wish we had a Sylvanus Urban a hundred and fifty years old. I wish, indeed, we had anything so old in America; would give a thousand of our new lamps for the one old, battered, but true magical light.

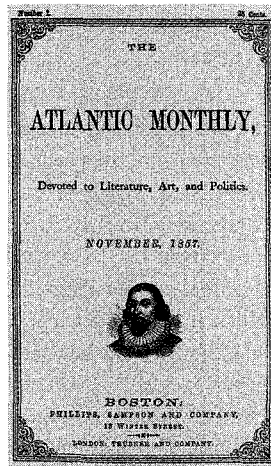
With this issue, Lowell’s magazine turns 150—declining, with respect, the “battered,” still aspiring to the magical. What, beyond the patient commitment of its owners, can account for this longevity? Consider *The Atlantic*’s passage: through a permanent revolution in technology, from the telephone, to the practical fountain pen, to the radio, to the note pad, to the television, to the Internet; through financial crises, beginning in 1857 with what *The Atlantic* called a national “flurry” over credit (or *liquidity*, to use the present flurry’s term); through national arguments over slavery, suffrage, evolution, immigration, prohibition, anti-communism, civil rights, feminism, gay rights, evolution and immigration (again); through the international contests of ideology that defined the last century and into the new contest that so far is shaping this one. How has *The Atlantic* endured? More to the point, why?

We may be able to spot a clue in the arguments. Unlike other publications, *The Atlantic* wasn’t created to track a particular identity found on a map—Hollywood’s glamour, New York’s sophistication, Washington’s power, Silicon Valley’s imagination. It wasn’t yoked from birth to a particular industry or technology, like the automobile or the computer. *The Atlantic* was created in Boston by writers who saw themselves as the country’s intellectual leaders, and so its scope from the start was national, if rather theoretical. It was founded on an

encompassing abstraction, expressed in the words that appeared in the first issue and that appear again on the cover of this one: In politics, it would “honestly endeavor to be the exponent of what its conductors believe to be the American idea.” That sounds pretty good. But those first conductors—among them Lowell, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Harriet Beecher Stowe—did not explain what they meant, not exactly. What or which “American idea”? The answer must have seemed obvious to them: In literature, they wanted to provide a platform for an emerging American voice; in politics, they had a cause—abolition—that gave granite definition to the American idea as equality, at least among men. One can easily imagine that beyond abolition, agreement would quickly break down. Only reluctantly did Lowell finally agree, in 1859, to publish an essay called “Ought Women to Learn the Alphabet?”

Today, our national facts would seem radically strange to Lowell—machines that can listen in on millions of telephone conversations, city-killing weapons that can fit inside satchels, tools that can pluck cells from embryos and hone them to fight disease—but the reference points for debate would seem quite familiar. What American faction, what American, doesn’t embrace both the revolutionary message of the Declaration of Independence and the restraining message of the Constitution? Our endless quarrels are over what these messages mean, over how the ideal should be made real. It is the endlessness of the quarrels—the elusiveness of the American idea, the tantalizing possibility of its full realization—that has sustained *The Atlantic*. Through the decades, *The Atlantic* has argued; over time, its writers have been found on both sides of some ques-

tions, as, without regard for party or clique or convention, the magazine has struggled with the great perplexities of the day. (This by turns fractious, forceful, and witty history is anthologized in a new collection of *Atlantic* pieces—called, as it happens, *The American Idea*—that Doubleday has just published.) Only a magazine devoted to understanding change could have thrived through so much of it. Only a magazine that constantly questions its own assumptions about the American idea could remain true to that idea’s potential. That, surely, was the founders’ original intent. (The image they selected for *The Atlantic*’s



first cover, pictured on the preceding page, is of John Winthrop, he of the "City upon a hill.") While we celebrate the magazine this month with glances back at the archive, we honor it more by continuing to turn our gaze ahead, with pieces like Walter Kirn's romp through the multitaskers' labyrinth, Robert D. Kaplan's report on the decline of American might, and Caitlin Flanagan's essay on Hillary Clinton.

To mark this anniversary, we also invited an eclectic group of thinkers who have had cause to consider the American idea to describe its future and the greatest challenges to it. We provided little more charge than that, beyond asking that they accomplish this feat in 300 words or so. (It should be noted that Judith Martin—Miss Manners—delivered precisely 300, one of them *whoops*. Her old colleague Tom Wolfe, who happens to differ with Martin on one point of historical interpretation, returned again and again to the library, revising his piece

until it reached 2,100 words.) We asked artists to perform the same feat with a drawing or a photograph.

In the pages that follow, George F. Will rings an alarm over the danger inherent in embracing a singular American idea, but many of the contributors agree on a rough definition of the idea itself—the easy part, as John Hope Franklin suggests. Yet has this idea been put into practice or not? Is it more threatened by Americans' faith in God or by their secularism? By Islamic fundamentalism or by our response to it? By poverty, racism, celebrity, the gobbling up of natural resources? Will science and the entrepreneurial spirit carry us through? Should we rejoice on this anniversary, or should we be angry? What follows is a wise, amused, pained, and impassioned cacophony, and, in sum, a statement of the sustaining value of *The Atlantic*, its commitment to the open mind in pursuit of an idea whose realization was partial and fragile 150 years ago, and still is.

—THE EDITORS



JOHN UPDIKE *The Individual*

The American idea, as I understand it, is to trust people to know their own minds and to act in their own enlightened self-interest, with a necessary respect for others. Totalitarian governments promise relief for deprived and desperate people, but in the end are maintained in power by terrorism from above rather than the consent of the governed. Empowerment of the individual was the idea in 1857, and after a century and a half of travail and misadventure among human societies, there is no better idea left standing. The idea of individual freedom, undermined by a collectivist tide in the first half of the last century and disregarded by radical Islam today, now spreads through an electronic culture of music, television, and the Internet, even under governments fearful of losing control.

Not only are ordinary citizens to be trusted, in the American idea, but leaders of government, too. Those who have lost the people's trust can be voted out. To be sure, there is a lag in the process, but a process more immediately responsive to the people's will might have ousted Lincoln and Washington in their unpopular moments. A certain

trust in a nation's overall soundness and stability is implied in the contract between the governed and the governors. American democracy speaks not just in votes and policies, but in the buoyancy, good nature, and mutual tolerance of its people. These qualities persist even in difficult times—and what times are devoid of difficulties, of contention and conflict and challenge? The American idea builds them in, creating not a static paradise but a productively competitive section of the Earth's humanity.

The challenges ahead? A fury against liberal civilization by the world's poor, who have nothing to lose; a ruinous further depletion of the world's natural assets; a global warming that will change world climate and with it world geopolitics. The American idea, promulgated in a land of plenty, must prepare to sustain itself in a world of scarcity. ▀

John Updike has published more than 20 novels, as well as many collections of short stories, poetry, and criticism. He has twice won the Pulitzer Prize for his fiction.

RAY KURZWEIL *Frontiers*

The American idea is to push beyond frontiers, whether in geography (Manifest Destiny), science (splitting

the atom, DNA), invention (the telephone, the lightbulb, the airplane, the Internet), industry (mass production), music (jazz, rock and roll), or popular culture (Hollywood).

The means of creativity have now been democratized. For example, anyone with an inexpensive high-definition video camera and a personal computer can create a high-quality, full-length motion picture. A musician in her dorm room commands the resources once available only in a multimillion-dollar recording studio. Just a few years ago, a couple of students at Stanford University wrote some software on their personal computers that revolutionized Web searches and became the basis of a company now worth \$150 billion. Individuals now have the tools to break new ground in every field.

These information tools are more than doubling their power in terms of price-performance and capacity every year, which means multiplying by a thousand in less than a decade, by a billion in 25 years. Every decade, according to my models, we are also shrinking the size of these technologies by a factor of about 100. Today you can e-mail movies and sound recordings and books. In about 20 years, you will be able to e-mail

three-dimensional products; they will be "printed" in 3-D using tabletop nanotechnology assembly devices, which will rearrange molecules from inexpensive input material into complex products. So you will be able to e-mail a blouse, for instance, or a computer, or a toaster—or the toast. That will democratize the means of production, so we'll finally be able to bury Karl Marx.

This exponential growth of information technology is not limited to electronics; it also includes our biology. This biotechnology revolution is also doubling its power each year, and will ultimately bring great gains to human longevity. That is not a new story. Life expectancy was only about 40 years in 1857, when *The Atlantic Monthly* was founded. It was 47 years in 1900. It is now pushing 80, but this increase will go into high gear in about a decade.

Despite well-publicized obstructions, the American drive to push beyond frontiers is alive and well, and represents the dominant philosophy in the world today,

with continued exponential advance on the horizon. ▀

Ray Kurzweil is a member of the National Inventors Hall of Fame and a winner of the National Medal of Technology.

AZAR NAFISI

Sivilization

On the first page of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Huck informs us that the Widow Douglas decided to take him up and "sivilize" him, but

it was rough living in the house all the time, considering how dismal regular and decent the widow was in all her ways; and so when I couldn't stand it no longer I lit out.

The way Huck subverts a whole way of living, a way of thinking and relating to the world, by misspelling a word is to my mind a pure expression of the American idea. That idea is always threatened by another: the secure and smug world from which Huck and Jim turn away. Throughout the book, Huck and Jim

turn the "decent" and "sivilized" world on its head, and we come out in the end with a new definition of these words.

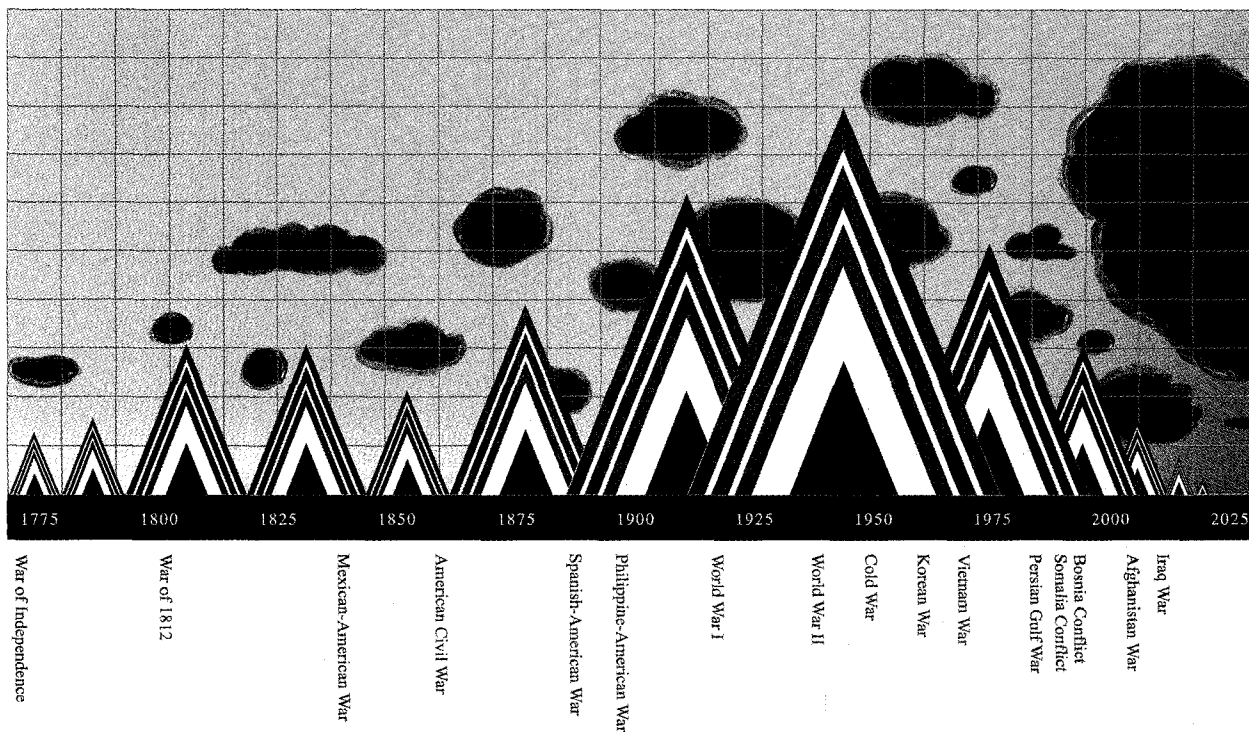
These subversive characters, like Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Gatsby*, Zora Neale Hurston's *Janie*—all outcasts who refuse to comply—are part of a tradition in American fiction. Like Huck, they risk hell but trust their own instincts and experiences above static convention. They are thoughtful and reflect upon these experiences; they are critical not just of others but of themselves, and they act upon their reflections. This is the American idea I would like to return to: a slight subversion, an instinctive urge to do the right thing, which, in the eyes of the "correct" world, might seem to be exactly the wrong thing.

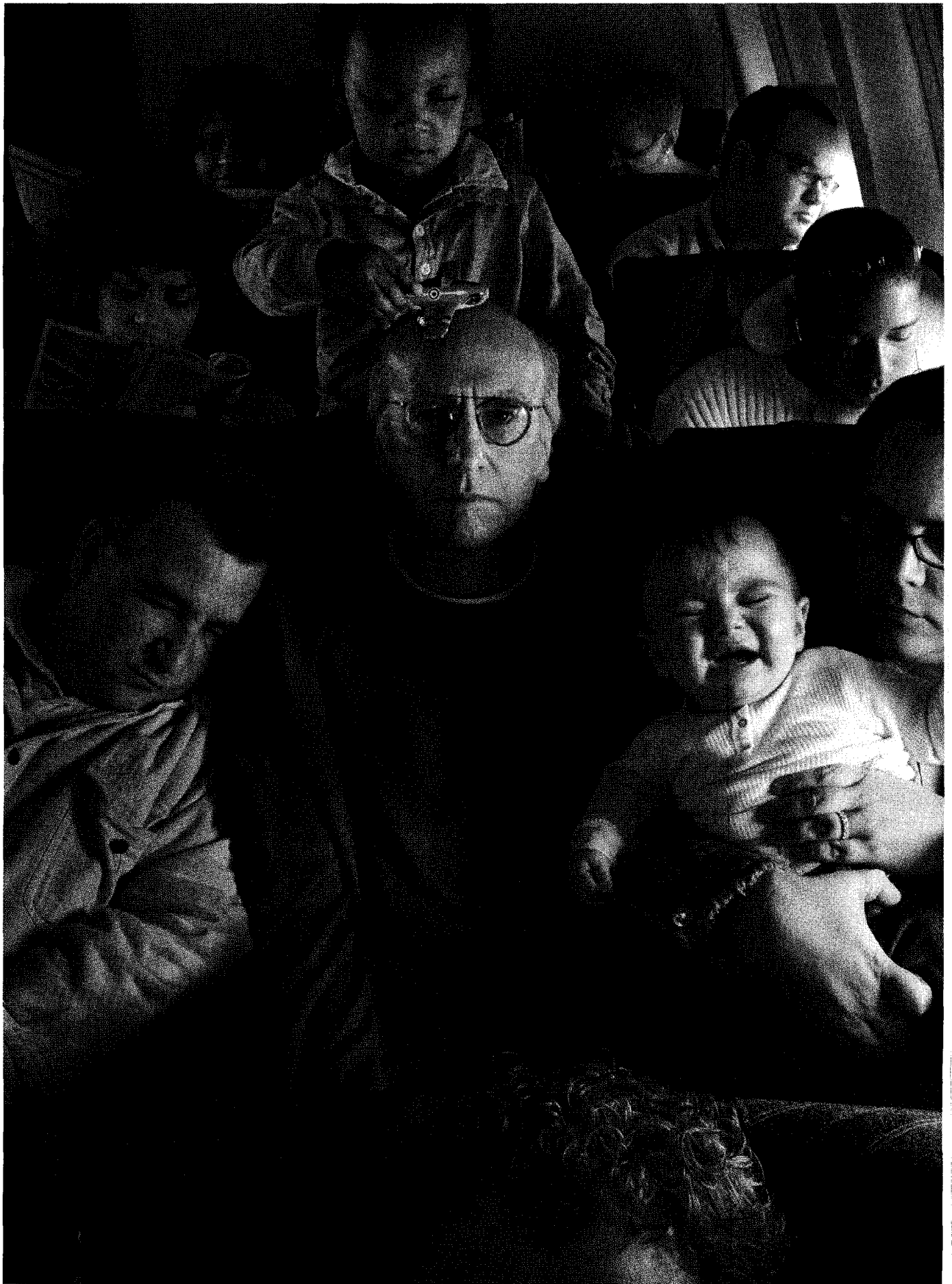
The idea that I want to believe America was founded on also depended on challenging the world as it is and, by standing up to civilized society, redefining it. That idea was essentially based on a poetic vision, on imagining something

MILTON GLASER

The Rise and Fall of the American Idea

Milton Glaser is a graphic designer.





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Cardmember *Harry David*

Member Since *God knows when*

Occupation *Life Coach*

Proudest accomplishment *Convinced client to leave wife and join the circus*

Recent trip *Central Africa*

Favorite moment *staged successful coup d'etat against oppressive dictatorship... renamed capital "Larrytown".*

Most interesting souvenir *"I ♥ Larrytown" bumper sticker.*

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GERHARD RICHTER
September 11

Gerhard Richter is a German artist whose work spans nearly five decades.



that did not exist. It has been pointed out that the man who wrote the Declaration of Independence—who could state with simplicity and beauty that every individual has the right to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”—was himself a slaveowner. Jefferson lived in a slave-owning society, one in which half of the non-slave population, the women, were not equal citizens. Yet for all its flaws, that society’s saving grace was its foundation on a certain set of beliefs that transcended the individuals, their prejudices, and their times and allowed for the possibility of a different future, foreshadowing a time when other women and men, a Martin Luther King Jr. or an Elizabeth Cady Stanton, could take their ideas and words and suffuse them with new and risky and bold meanings, and with new dreams.

Huck closes his adventures with this statement:

But I reckon I got to light out for the territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she’s going to adopt me and sivilize me, and I can’t stand it. I been there before.

This, of course, is the whole point: In order to keep the American idea fresh and new, it must be constantly challenged. For the American idea to endure, we have to “light out,” and to find new ways to resist the “sivilizing” impulse of the Widow Douglasses and Aunt Sallys among us.

And yet today it seems that America, gripped by social and political crisis, has become almost forgetful of that idea. Cynical, shallow, defensive, and at the same time arrogant and greedy, it is

unfaithful to its instincts and refuses to be reflective, mistaking blame for criticism and self-criticism, and believing that success at any cost is more important than failure with honor, taking as its ideal the Widow Douglas’s paradise rather than Huck Finn’s hell.

The question is: Can we still hope to be a little less “sivilized”? ▀

Azar Nafisi is the author of *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2003).

GEORGE F. WILL
The Danger

It is a good and very American idea to avoid the definite article in locutions like “the American idea.” “The”? There are many American ideas pertaining to liberty under a constitutional government of limited, delegated, and enumerated powers. The best of these ideas can

be found in the Federalist Papers, which are agreeably untainted by monomania.

It has been often said that any idea is dangerous if it is a person's only idea. Talk about "the" American idea is dangerous because it often is a precursor to, and an excuse for, the missionary impulse that sleeps lightly, when it sleeps at all, in many Americans. After all, if the essence of America can be distilled to a single idea, it must be supremely important, and there might be a moral imperative to export it.

In 1990, with the collapse of the Berlin Wall still reverberating around the world, Jeane Kirkpatrick wisely warned Americans: "There is no mystical American 'mission,' or purpose to be 'found' independently of the U.S. Constitution." With the Cold War over, and the moral and military mobilization it demanded no longer necessary, Kirkpatrick wrote: "The time when America should bear such unusual burdens is past. With a return to 'normal' times, we can again become a normal nation."

If, paradoxically, "the American idea" is that the definite article is definitely inapposite in that phrase, then the greatest challenge to it is the false idea that American patriotism is inextricably bound up with the notion that being a normal nation is somehow beneath America's dignity. Belief in American exceptionalism is compatible with the idea of American normality: Our nation *is* exceptionally well-founded and exceptionally faithful to an exceptionally nuanced system of prudential political axioms. But one of those axioms—it is the crux of the Madisonian persuasion—is that *no* polity is exempt from the passions and failings that make governance problematic, always and everywhere. ▀

George F. Will is a Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist for *The Washington Post*.

CORNEL WEST *Niggerization*

The fundamental irony of American history is that we follow the better angels of our nature when we honestly and compassionately confront the

devilish realities we would like to ignore or deny. The founding of this most American of periodicals was motivated, in part, by a courageous resistance against the American institution of white-supremacist slavery. We must never forget that when this grand intellectual forum was established, the precious U.S. Constitution was, in practice, a pro-slavery document. To put it clearly yet crudely, the deep democratization of America was pitted against the ugly niggerization in America.

Democratization is the best of the American idea—in principle and practice. The sublime notion that each and every ordinary person has a dignity that warrants his or her voice being heard in shaping the destiny of society remains a revolutionary force in the 21st century—in the face of the power of autocratic empires, plutocratic states, and xenophobic communities. Niggerization is neither simply the dishonoring and devaluing of black people nor solely the economic exploitation and political disenfranchisement of them. It is also the wholesale attempt to impede democratization—to turn potential citizens into intimidated, fearful, and helpless subjects.

Since the ugly events of 9/11, we have witnessed the attempt of the Bush administration—with elites in support and populists complacent—to promote the niggerization of the American people. Like the myopic white greed, fear, and hatred that fueled the niggerization of black people, right-wing greed, fear, and hatred have made all of us feel intimidated, fearful, and helpless in the face of the terrorist attacks. And, as in the 19th century, we've almost lost our democracy.

The future of the American idea—both then and now, here and abroad—depends on the vision, courage, and determination of decent and compassionate people to engage in Socratic questioning of the powers that be, to take the risk of prophetic witness, and to preserve a hope for democratization. Our nation and world now have the blues, so we must learn from our blues people—from the grand examples of Frederick Douglass, Martin Luther King Jr., Fannie

Lou Hamer, Myles Horton, and Muriel Rukeyser. The American practice of niggerization must die for the American idea of democratization to live—yet again. ▀

Cornel West, whose most recent book is *Democracy Matters* (2004) and whose most recent CD is *Never Forget: A Journey of Revelations* (2007), is a professor of religion at Princeton University.

ERIC SCHMIDT *New New Things*

The American idea has always involved innovation.

Alexis de Tocqueville's observations about our country in 1831 can be paraphrased as: America is unique because of its abundance of land, its absence of aristocracy, and its democratic and equalitarian institutions and values. In different ways, these all reflect the possibility of newness—new places, new people with a chance to be heard, new institutions that must newly earn and re-earn their influence.

America's history of innovation has drawn on the inherent optimism of Americans, even when realities are discouraging; the strong commitment to education, and particularly higher education; the egalitarian nature of our culture, with its creed that "anyone can grow up to be successful and rich"; and the remarkable success of our democracy when confronted with the great challenges of modern life.

What is most remarkable is that these values and virtues still apply, and that America therefore continues to grow, despite all the dire warnings we hear. Its culture still fosters growth in ideas, in wealth and health, and especially in the capabilities of its people.

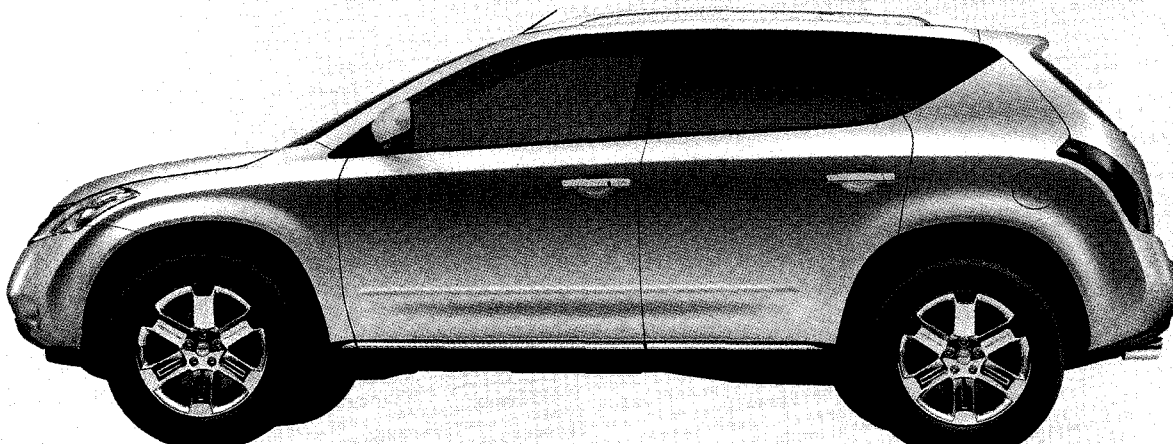
America's land lets us dream of solar farms and fields of switchgrass or other sources of fuel that would help eliminate our dependence on oil. The absence of aristocracy lets us believe that anyone can become president, and the presence of democracy lets us throw out our bad governments before it's too late. The egalitarian values, passed on in a broad system of public schooling and reflected in and enhanced by tolerance of immigration, let us celebrate entrepreneurship—a French

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word, an American reality—despite its continually destabilizing effects.

Obviously we face great challenges, but earlier generations have faced far worse: civil war, world wars, childhood diseases like polio. America's resilience, past and present, is really about culture and values—culture based on equal opportunity, and values based on education and ambition. No one predicted the new gilded age of hedge funds or the scale of the Internet; we can't predict the future, but we know the American story will continue. This means we can overcome all the challenges we obsess about now—and all the new ones we have not yet invented. ▀

Eric Schmidt is the chairman and CEO of Google.

JOYCE CAROL OATES
The Human Idea

How heartily sick the world has grown, in the first seven years of the 21st century, of the American idea!

Speak with any non-American, travel to any foreign country, and the consensus is: The American idea has become a cruel joke, a blustery and bellicose body-builder luridly bulked up on steroids, consequently low on natural testosterone, deranged and myopic, dangerous. D. H. Lawrence once remarked that the "essential American soul is hard, isolate, stoic, and a killer"—and except for "stoic," this description is as accurate in 2007 as it was more than 80 years ago, when Lawrence's brilliantly unorthodox *Studies in Classic American Literature* was published. How would Lawrence react to today's quasi-mystical, shamefully self-aggrandizing American idea? Very likely, along these lines:

Freedom ... ? The land of the free!
This the land of the free! Why, if I say
anything that displeases them, the
free mob will lynch me, and that's
my freedom. Free? Why, I have never
been in any country where the indi-
vidual has such an abject fear of his
fellow countrymen. Because, as I say,

they are free to lynch him the moment
he shows he is not one of them.

(If not "lynch" precisely, how about "crucify in the media"? The ravenous tabloid press and ever-more-ominously "mainstream" media have become the lynch mob of contemporary times, pummeling those guilty of the most innocuous blunders with the ferocity with which they pummel outright criminals.)

What is most questionable—indeed, most dangerous—about the American idea is its very formulation: that there is a distinctly American idea, standing in contrast to Canadian, British, French, Chinese, Icelandic, Estonian, or mere human ideas. Our unexamined belief in American exceptionalism has allowed us to imagine ourselves above anything so constrictive as international law. American exceptionalism makes our imperialism altruistic, our plundering of the world's resources a healthy exercise of capitalism and "free trade." From

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childhood, we are indoctrinated with the propaganda that America is superior to other nations; that our way of life, a mass-market "democracy" manipulated by lobbyists, is superior to all other forms of government; that no matter how frivolous and debased, our American culture is the supreme culture, as our language is the supreme language; that our most blatantly imperialistic and cynical political goals are always idealistic, while the goals of other nations are transparently opportunistic.

Perhaps the most pernicious of American ideas is the revered "My country, right or wrong," with its thinly veiled threat of punishment for those who hesitate to participate in a criminal patriotism. The myth of American exceptionalism begins with the revolt of the Colonies against the British crown. In 1776, what a thrilling, exhilarating American idea! But in the first decade of the 21st century, in a vastly altered world, and considering the higher degree

of civilization embodied by Canada—which waged no war against the British and was disinclined to rush into war or celebrate the violence of the frontier or declare itself exceptional—it might be a timely American idea to examine our very origins. ▀

Joyce Carol Oates is the Roger S. Berlind Distinguished Professor in the Humanities at Princeton University. Her most recent books are *High Lonesome: New and Selected Stories 1966–2006* and *The Gravedigger's Daughter* (2007).

BERNARD LEWIS *Second Acts*

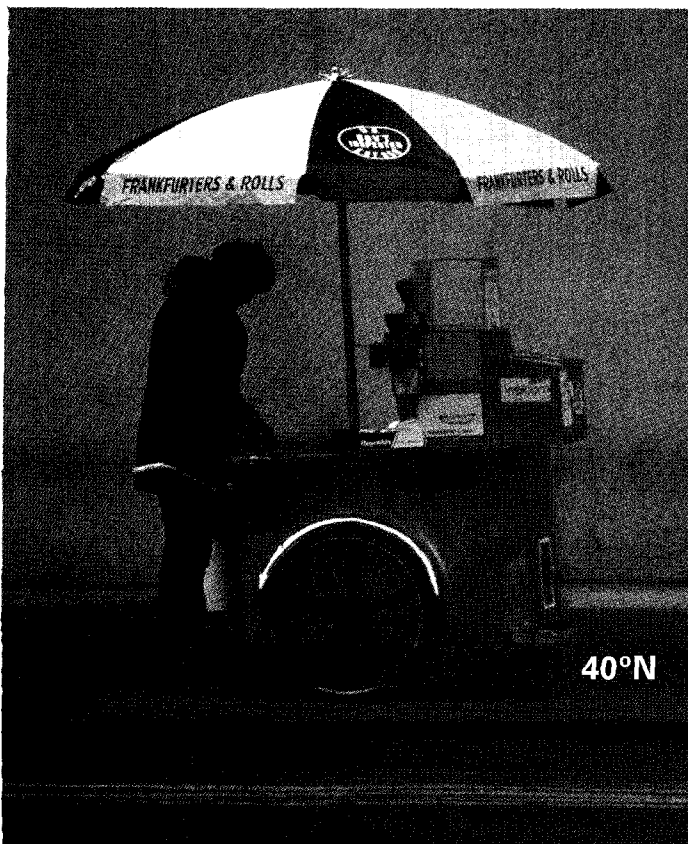
When I look back over my 91 years, I realize that I have been extraordinarily fortunate. I was a soldier in World War II, and I wasn't killed or even wounded. I was a Jew in 20th-century Europe, and I wasn't murdered or even persecuted. The first of these I attribute to the fortunes of war; the second to the wisdom of my forebears, who chose to live in England. I am still grateful to them for that choice, as my descendants

will surely be grateful to me for having come to America.

My first acquaintance with Americans, apart from books and films, came after Pearl Harbor, when some American liaison officers were attached to the branch of His Majesty's service in which I was then serving. After the war, I became a frequent visitor to the United States and, finding it addictive, moved here in 1974.

The better part of my life was dominated by two great struggles—the first against Nazism, the second against Bolshevism. In both of these, after long and bitter conflict, we were victorious. Both were a curse to their own peoples, as well as a threat to the world, and for those peoples, defeat was a liberation.

Today we confront a third totalitarian perversion, this time of Islam—a challenge in some ways similar, in some different. On our side, I see the same initial unwillingness to confront realities—to realize who we are, who they are, and what is at stake. But there is also a



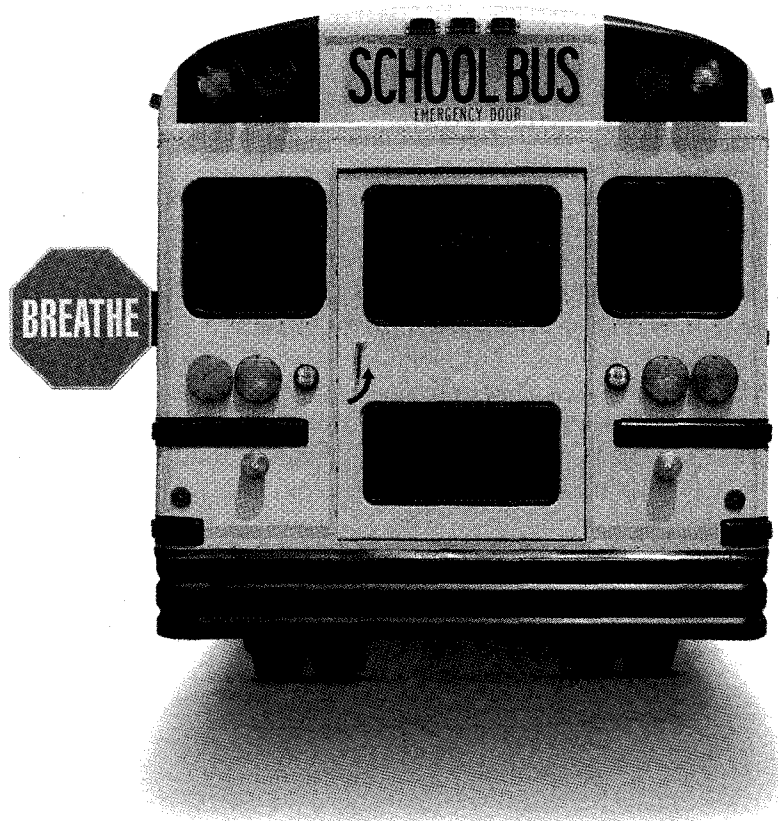
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difference in the very nature of what we face. The Axis had no weapons of mass destruction. The Soviets had them, but were deterred from using them by what came to be known as "mutual assured destruction." Our present adversaries either have or will soon have weapons of mass destruction, but for them, with their apocalyptic mind-set, mutual assured destruction would not be a deterrent; it would be an inducement.

I still remember my first two impressions of Americans, derived from my wartime comrades. One was that they were unteachable. When America entered the war, we in Britain had been at war for more than two years. We had made many mistakes, and had learned something from them. We tried to pass these lessons on to our new allies and save them from paying again the price that we had paid in blood and toil. But they wouldn't listen—their ways were not our ways, and they would do things their way, not ours. And so they went ahead and made mistakes—some repeating ours, some new and original. What was really new and original—and this is my second lasting impression—was the speed with which they recognized these mistakes, and devised and applied the means to correct them. This was beyond anything in our experience.

In looking at the world today, and at our present predicament, I vividly recall that first impression, and anxiously await the second. ▀

Bernard Lewis is the Cleveland E. Dodge Professor of Near Eastern Studies Emeritus at Princeton.

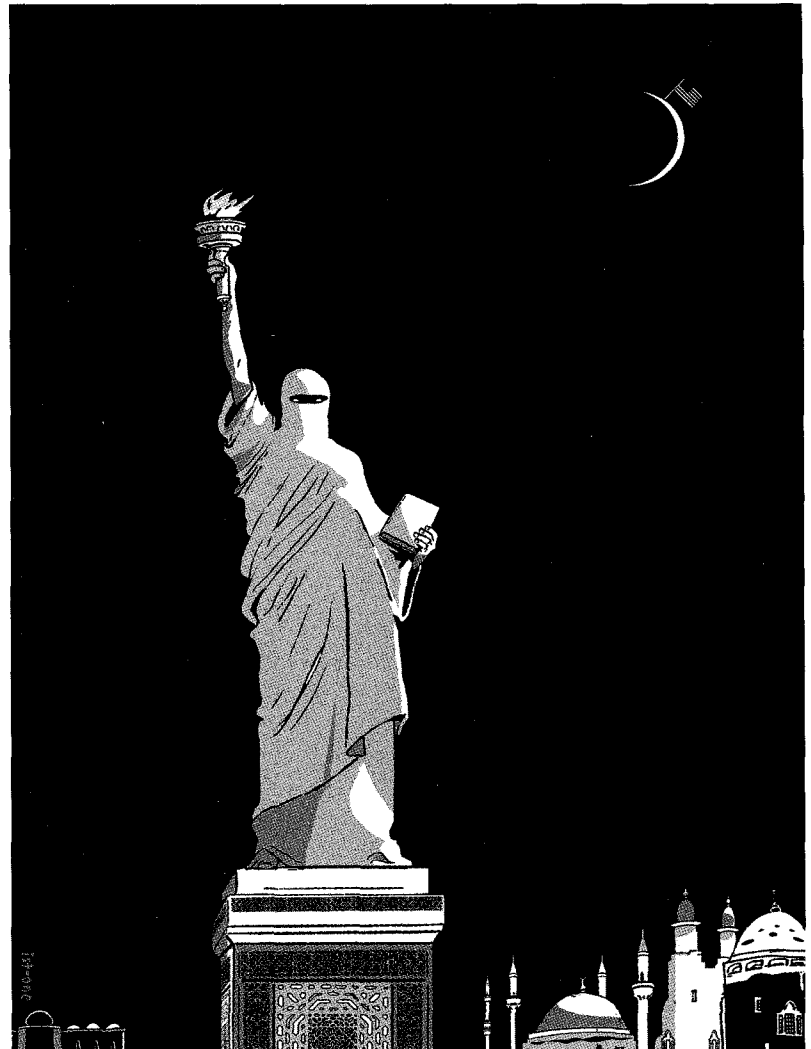
DAVID FOSTER WALLACE *Just Asking*

Are some things still worth dying for? Is the American idea¹ one such thing? Are you up for a thought experiment? What if we chose to regard the 2,973 innocents killed in the atrocities of 9/11 not as victims but as democratic martyrs, "sacrifices on the altar

¹ Given the strict Gramm-Rudman-esque space limit here, let's just please all agree that we generally know what this term connotes—an open society, consent of the governed, enumerated powers, Federalist 10, pluralism, due process, transparency ... the whole democratic roil.

ISTVAN BANYAI *Muslim Democracy*

Istvan Banyai is an illustrator and the author of *Zoom* (1995).



of freedom"?² In other words, what if we decided that a certain baseline vulnerability to terrorism is part of the price of the American idea? And, thus, that ours is a generation of Americans called to make great sacrifices in order to preserve our democratic way of life—sacrifices not just of our soldiers and money but of our personal safety and comfort?

In still other words, what if we chose to accept the fact that every few years, despite all reasonable precautions, some hundreds or thousands of us may die in the sort of ghastly terrorist attack

that a democratic republic cannot 100-percent protect itself from without subverting the very principles that make it worth protecting?

Is this thought experiment monstrous? Would it be monstrous to refer to the 40,000-plus domestic highway deaths we accept each year because the mobility and autonomy of the car are evidently worth that high price? Is monstrousness why no serious public figure now will speak of the delusory trade-off of liberty for safety that Ben Franklin warned about more than 200 years ago? What exactly has changed between Franklin's time and ours? Why now can

² (This phrase is Lincoln's, more or less.)



vessels, which is essential for tumor growth and metastasis. Dayan's project may provide invaluable information on drug targets and their potential to be regulated for cancer treatment.

► **PHILIP STREICH** knew that carbon nanotubes were "stronger than diamonds, 10,000 times more conductive than silver, [with] the highest strength-to-weight ratio of anything known to man." But scientists have assumed they are insoluble and therefore impractical for most real-world applications. Philip built his own spectrometer and produced the first quantifiable evidence that carbon nanotubes are thermodynamically soluble—which may be the key to finally realizing their potential as a supermaterial.

► **DMITRY VAINTROB** Dmitry was just 8 when he asked his dad if there were an infinite number of Pythagorean triplets. His mathematician father suggested Dmitry try to figure out the answer for himself. Solving that problem was so much fun, Dmitry was hooked. His mathematics project also won at the 2007 Intel Science Talent Search. (See description on opposite page.)

UC Berkeley, Intel supports a dynamic forum for students to put entrepreneurial skills into practice.

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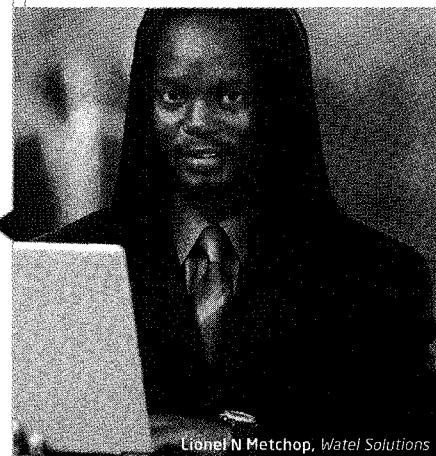
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ity research grants, and the funding of open and collaborative research labs. More than 250 Intel-sponsored research engagements are currently under way, with topics ranging from silicon modification to digital health. In addition, the Intel Foundation supports graduate fellowships at select U.S. universities awarded to outstanding students in engineering, computer science, and other technical majors focusing on semiconductor technologies, micro-architecture, and communications.

BUILDING THE FUTURE ON IDEAS

To date, Intel has invested more than \$1 billion in education initiatives across elementary-, secondary-, and higher-education levels around the world. Our role goes beyond funding; we are active collaborators and



Lionel N. Metchop, Watel Solutions

"This generation of young scientists and inventors will surely find solutions to global issues and change the world for the better."

Craig Barrett, *Chairman, Intel Corporation*

participants. In addition to those you've seen in these pages, we sponsor a range of community programs in both formal and informal educational settings. From professional development for teachers to after-school project-based activities for underserved youth, we support improved teaching and learning through the effective use of technology.

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Entrepreneurship is key to building innovation capacity and taking technological advancements to market. In collaboration with the Lester Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation at the Haas School of Business,

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Seeding the Future

YOUNG PEOPLE

embody many of the characteristics we cherish in our greatest innovators: unbounded thinking, passionate curiosity, fearlessness to try new things, and persistent hope in the face of obstacles. The best education nurtures these qualities and prepares students to apply them in school, work, and life. But innovating in the 21st century also requires what educators are calling 21st-century skills. These include digital literacy, problem solving, critical thinking, and collaboration, along with excellence in math, science, and engineering.

INTEL SCIENCE TALENT SEARCH

A future Nobel laureate just might come from the ranks of America's most prestigious precollege science competition, aka the "junior Nobel Prize." In fact, six already have. This 60-year-old competition, sponsored by Intel since 1998, gives high-school seniors the chance to have an original research project recognized by a jury of renowned scientists and displayed at the National Academy of Sciences.

Meet the Winning Scientists

These talented students were selected from more than 1,600 applicants and 40 finalists as the 2007 Intel Science Talent Search winners.

ways to associate algebraic structures to topological spaces. His research, related to string theory, may have important implications in theoretical physics.

INTEL INTERNATIONAL SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING FAIR

What does it take to make it to the world's largest precollege science competition? It starts with a good idea—followed by curiosity, enthusiasm for research, and the motivation to overcome barriers. This year's impressive projects included potential treatments for diseases, valuable environmental research, and a whole range of life-improving tools.

"Even if you think that what you want to do is impossible, go ahead and go for it, because you never know what you can accomplish."

Mary Masterman, First-Place Winner, 2007 Intel Science Talent Search



Intel has made a deep commitment to foster 21st-century education. We do this with a broad range of programs designed to advance math, science, entrepreneurship, and research. These programs provide rich, interactive experiences to engage students in the study of math and science—and to help develop the next generation of innovative thinkers.

STIMULATING SCIENCE

Intel encourages this innovation through two annual competitions that allow students to tackle challenging scientific questions. Designed to promote critical reasoning and use of the scientific method, these competitions demonstrate how crucial math and science skills are to solving problems in today's technological world.

- **MARY MASTERMAN:** *First place, \$100,000 scholarship.* Mary built a spectrograph that identifies the specific characteristics, or "fingerprints," of different kinds of molecules. Spectrographs have wide applications in research and industry and can cost as much as \$100,000. Mary built hers for just \$300, machining her own parts and aligning the optics herself.
- **JOHN PARDON:** *Second place, \$75,000 scholarship.* John's mathematics project solved a classical open problem in differential geometry. He used a new approach to extend findings already known in polygons to a broad array of shapes.
- **DMITRY VAINTROB:** *Third place, \$50,000 scholarship.* Dmitry's sophisticated investigation evaluated

As part of the Fair, Intel's ISEF Educator Academy creates a forum for educators and government officials to explore innovative techniques to engage young minds in science and mathematics. The Academy trains participants on methods to spark scientific discovery that could result in the next big idea at the renowned Fair.

Meet the Science Fair Winners

These inspiring students earned top honors, receiving an Intel Foundation Young Scientist Award and a \$50,000 college scholarship.

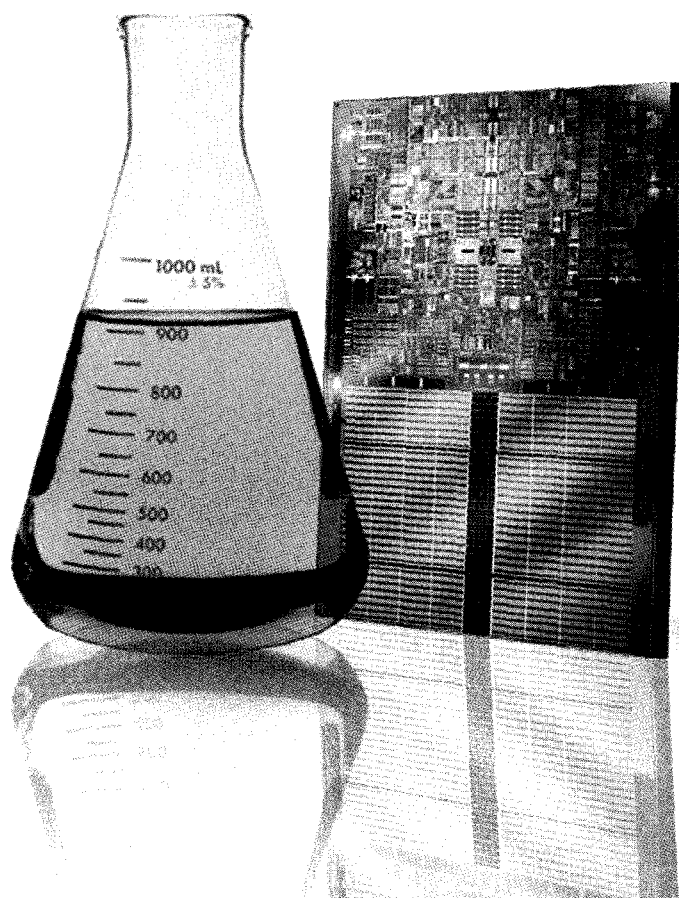
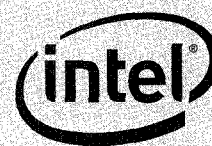
- **DAYAN LI** interned at the National Institutes of Health last year and dove right into one of the most daunting concerns of our time: cancer. His research focused on angiogenesis, the growth of new capillaries from existing blood

RE OF THE AMERICAN IDEA MINDS OF TODAY'S STUDENTS

s long been recognized as the engine of
omic growth. Without a pipeline of talent to
generation's big ideas, our future is at risk.

believe that education is the springboard to
ong the way, we've met some of the bright-
ds in the country. These students have al-
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y have worked on some of the most critical
time, including alternative energy and a cure
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MICHAEL BIERUT
American Smile

Michael Bierut is a graphic designer, a partner at Pentagram, and a founder of DesignObserver.com.



we not have a serious national conversation about sacrifice, the inevitability of sacrifice—either of (a) some portion of safety or (b) some portion of the rights and protections that make the American idea so incalculably precious?

In the absence of such a conversation, can we trust our elected leaders to value and protect the American idea as they act to secure the homeland? What are the effects on the American idea of Guantánamo, Abu Ghraib, PATRIOT Acts I and II, warrantless surveillance, Executive Order 13233, corporate contractors performing military functions, the Military Commissions Act, NSPD 51, etc., etc.? Assume for a moment that some of these measures really have helped make our persons and property safer—are they worth it? Where and when was the public debate on whether they're worth it? Was there no such debate because we're not capable of having or demanding one? Why not? Have we actually become so selfish and scared that we don't even want to *consider* whether some things trump safety? What kind of future does that augur? ▀

David Foster Wallace is the author of several books, including *Infinite Jest* (1996), *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again* (1997), and *Consider the Lobster* (2005).

EDWARD O. WILSON
Manifest Ecology

The central issue for America is sustainable development. Somehow we, and other countries, have to find a way to continue raising the quality of life without wrecking the planet.

Let's not kid ourselves that the United States is blessed by God. Our mostly European forebears were not given this land as a gift. They conquered it, and in the process they swept aside one race and enslaved another. They took possession of the world's richest remaining store of natural resources and set out to use it up as fast as possible. We inherited from them, and still possess, a rich and bountiful country. Although we're halfway down the barrel of nonrenewable resources, we have enough time remaining to learn the prudence necessary for sustainable development.

The problem, simply put, is this: Long-term thinking is for the most part alien to the American mind. We have to change that. To look far forward and to acquire enough accurate vision requires better self-understanding. That in turn will depend on a grasp of history—not just of the latest tick of the geological

clock that transpired during the republic's existence, but of deep history, across the hundreds of millennia when genetic human nature evolved. Our basic qualities may seem a crazy jumble of tribalism, piety, ambition, fear, envy, exaltation, and spirituality, but they make sense in light of humanity's deep history. They are our essence, and now, unfortunately, a few of them also present the greatest risk to the security of civilization.

Conservation and environmentalism are not hobbies; they are a survival practice. America invented conservation; we launched the environmental movement. Now we need a stronger ethic, one woven in more effective ways from science and poetry. The foundation of it will be the recognition that humanity was born within the biosphere, and that we are a biological species in a biological world. Like the other species teeming around us, we are exquisitely adapted to this biosphere and to no other—in anatomy, physiology, life cycle, mind, and, perhaps in us alone, spirit.

An allegiance to our biological heritage will be our ultimate strength. If we ignore that reality and continue to degrade the world that gave us birth by extinguishing natural ecosystems and species, we will permanently harm ourselves. By cutting away our own roots, we risk losing the dream of sustainable development. ▀

Edward O. Wilson, a biologist and Pulitzer Prize-winning author, is the Pellegrino University Professor Emeritus at Harvard.

JOHN HOPE FRANKLIN
The Cover-Up

If the American idea was to subdue Native Americans and place them at the disposal of European settlers, to import several million Africans to the New World and subject them to a lifetime of slavery, to impose on Asian immigrants a lifetime of discrimination, then perhaps the American idea was not so admirable.

If the American idea, once the Civil War had concluded, was to sentence the freedmen to a lifetime of racial segregation,



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discrimination, and humiliation, then perhaps the American idea was not so praiseworthy.

If the American idea, during and after Reconstruction, was to subject the freedmen to new levels of indignities, and new forms of so-called racial integrity by defining the nature of the blood in the veins of a so-called white person, and to sentence entire communities to race riots that rivaled the pogroms of Eastern Europe, then perhaps the American idea was not quite so attractive.

If the American idea was to fight every war from the beginning of colonization to the middle of the 20th century with Jim Crow armed forces, in the belief that this would promote the American idea of justice and equality, then the American idea was an unmitigated disaster and a denial of the very principles that this country claimed as its rightful heritage.

The American idea is the nation's holiday garb, its festive dress, its Sunday best. It covers up an everyday practice of betraying the claims of equality, justice, and democracy. It calls for Thomas Jefferson to advise his young protégé Edward Coles to abandon his plan to emancipate his slaves and migrate to Illinois, and to reconcile himself to his country's "unfortunate condition." While

Coles did not accept Jefferson's advice, many of his contemporaries did, thus strengthening the American idea of inequality and injustice.

It is fairly late in the game, but one hopes that there is still time to grasp the reality of American life for those of different racial and national backgrounds and to embrace the country's professed ideals of freedom, equality, and justice. As an *Atlantic* contributor wrote in the magazine's second issue, in December 1857:

The ideal of a true republic, of a government of laws made and executed by the people, of which bards have sung and prophets dreamed, and for which martyrs have suffered and heroes died, may yet be possible to us, and the great experiment of the Western World be indeed a Model instead of a Warning to the nations. ■

John Hope Franklin, the James B. Duke Professor Emeritus of History at Duke University, is a past president of the American Historical Association and the recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor. His book *From Slavery to Freedom* has sold more than 4 million copies since its publication, in 1947.

NANCY PELOSI *Youth*

When the Founding Fathers gave birth to our great democracy, they had confidence that they were part of revolutionary change in the world, and

they had great faith in the future of our country. That confidence and faith are reflected in the Great Seal of the United States, where they included these words in Latin: *Novus Ordo Seclorum*—"a new order for the ages."

In establishing that new order, our Founders broadened our horizons, expanded our country, and imagined a better world. They also recognized that it is the responsibility of each generation to make America a better place for the next. That grand vision of our Founding Fathers has spurred on today's young people, fueling their unwillingness to accept the world as it is now. The impatience of youth is what gives me such faith in the future: With the power and passion of young people, our new order will indeed grow stronger and flourish for the ages.

In my recent travels as House speaker, I have met with presidents, prime ministers, and kings, but what has impressed me and inspired me the most are my encounters with young people. At a time when some world leaders question the value of constructive dialogue with their adversaries, young people are engaged in their own dialogue—talking about their hopes for a brighter future, and for peace and prosperity. These are the same conversations our Founders had two

AMERICA IS A DREAM, A VISION, A MIRACLE BASED ON ONE NOBLE IDEA-- THE IDEA THAT PEOPLE OF EVERY RACE AND RELIGION CAN LIVE TOGETHER IN PEACE. THAT EVERYONE IS ENTITLED TO EQUAL JUSTICE UNDER THE LAW AND THAT GOVERNMENT IS RESPONSIBLE TO THE GOVERNED.



BUT AN IDEA, DESPITE ITS AWESOME POWER, CAN BE DANGEROUSLY VULNERABLE. IT MUST BE SHELTERED AND GUARDED, NOURISHED AND PROTECTED. FEW THINGS ARE MORE TRAGIC THAN THE DEATH OF AN IDEA, ESPECIALLY ONE WHICH HAS BEEN A SHINING BEACON FOR THE ENTIRE WORLD.

STAN LEE *America Is a Dream*

TODAY, THE AMERICAN IDEA IS MENACED AS NEVER BEFORE. WHERE VARIETY HAD ONCE BEEN THE SOURCE OF OUR INCALCULABLE STRENGTH, IT HAS NOW BROUGHT AN ERA OF GROWING DIVISIVENESS AMONG OUR PEOPLE, A FEELING OF "US AGAINST THEM" REGARDLESS OF WHO THE "THEM" MIGHT BE.



WITH MEDICAL CARE WE CAN FIND NO CONSENSUS. IS THE WARMING OF EARTH MERE FANCY OR FACT? BETWEEN RED STATES AND BLUE STATES THE SCHISM GROWS WIDER. WAS THERE EVER A TIME WE WERE SO FAR APART?

centuries ago; as they continue today, so too does the American idea. ▀

Nancy Pelosi is the speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives.

JAMES Q. WILSON AND GEORGE L. KELLING

Decency

In thinking about the American idea, we decided to revisit a concept we first took up in these pages 25 years ago.

Americans value both order and freedom, and drawing a line between the two is no easy task. This may seem especially true where the more routine aspects of public order are concerned: How much freedom must be sacrificed in order to have quiet streets free of graffiti, aggressive panhandlers, prostitutes, and teenage gangs? Taken alone, few of these kinds of disorder constitute major crimes—but taken together, they deeply worry people who want to go about their public business secure in the sense that our society, and not some disorderly faction within it, controls public spaces.

In 1982, we argued in this magazine that the police should take public disorder as seriously as they take criminal conduct. We urged them to resume doing what was once one of their major tasks: constraining the public activity of

drunks, panhandlers, prostitutes, and gangs. And to this should be added a new assault on graffiti.

We suggested two rationales for this change: First, people feel threatened by public disorder; second, the chance that greater order would reduce crime rates. The first statement is obviously true; the second was a conjecture that has still been only partially tested.

Community order, we argued, would bring decent people back on the streets and discourage criminals from using public places; certain kinds of crimes (assault, robbery, and auto theft), therefore, would subsequently decline.

Virtually all of the evidence we have from studies of the police suggests that restoring order is associated with a drop in crime. This is reassuring, but it may not be conclusive. The idea has never been fully tested.

Public order is achieved neither by leaving alone everyone who is not a serious criminal nor by harassing everyone who uses the streets; it is achieved by a combination of family training, neighborhood norms, and official constraints that induce people to follow widely shared rules of behavior. Social science cannot settle the question of how much order ought to be maintained; that is a question of morality and politics. In this country,

the public's view seems quite clear: People believe, we think rightly, that it is a good thing if routine misconduct is discouraged by the gentle action of opinion and authority. It is rarely necessary to arrest an aggressive drunk, a rowdy gang member, or a graffiti artist; it is usually sufficient to discourage them by firm reminders. True freedom is encouraged by an environment of public decency and discouraged by one of neglect and disorder.

Decency in public places may be only a small part of the American idea, but especially for those people living in dangerous, gang-ridden neighborhoods, it is an important one. ▀

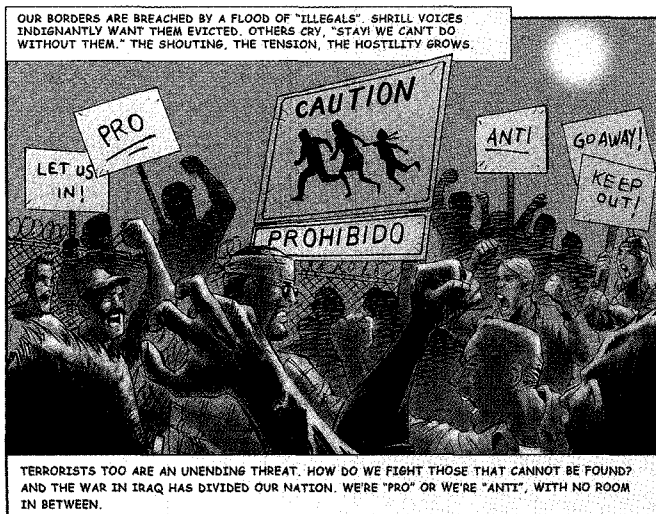
James Q. Wilson is the Ronald Reagan Professor of Public Policy at Pepperdine University. George L. Kelling is a professor at the Rutgers-Newark School of Criminal Justice and a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute. Their article "Broken Windows" was the cover story of the March 1982 *Atlantic*.

STEVEN WEINBERG

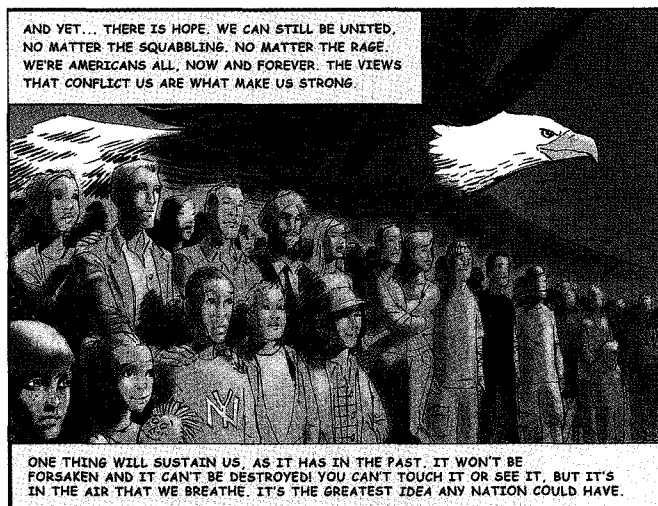
Inherited Opportunity

If any one idea can justly be called the American idea, it is that a child's circumstances at birth should not determine the station in life that that child will occupy as an adult. Americans swept away the instruments of English hereditary inequality—entails and titles of nobility—even before we had a constitution. At the Constitutional Convention,

Illustrations by Anthony Winn



Stan Lee is a writer, editor, and memoirist and the chairman emeritus of Marvel Comics.



men born to wealth, like Edmund Randolph and Pierce Butler, were no more respected than the cobbler's son Roger Sherman or the tallow chandler's son Benjamin Franklin. In the decades that followed, American egalitarianism was furthered by the Homestead Act, the Civil War amendments, the Civil Rights Act of 1871, the graduated income tax, the GI Bill, and other landmarks of our history.

But three related problems now cast doubt on the future of this American idea.

The first is that while education is increasingly essential to social and economic advancement, public schools outside expensive neighborhoods are still inadequate. This problem perhaps cannot be solved just by throwing money at it—but it also cannot be solved *without* throwing money at it, since we need to hire more and better teachers at higher salaries. This must be federal money. States offer to reduce taxes as they compete with one another to attract business, and relying on local taxpayers will

only perpetuate the failure of schools in poor neighborhoods.

Second, Congress has cut taxes for the rich and is under pressure to do away with the federal estate tax. Not only do such policies directly exacerbate a heritable inequality; they force cuts in spending needed for public goods, including education.

Third, all this is happening when the earnings gap between workers and executives or investors has been allowed to become obscene.

Until we change course, we are betraying the best American idea. ▀

Steven Weinberg, a professor at the University of Texas at Austin, won the 1979 Nobel Prize in physics.

STEVE BRODNER

The Thomas (Jefferson) Crown Affair

Steve Brodner is an illustrator.

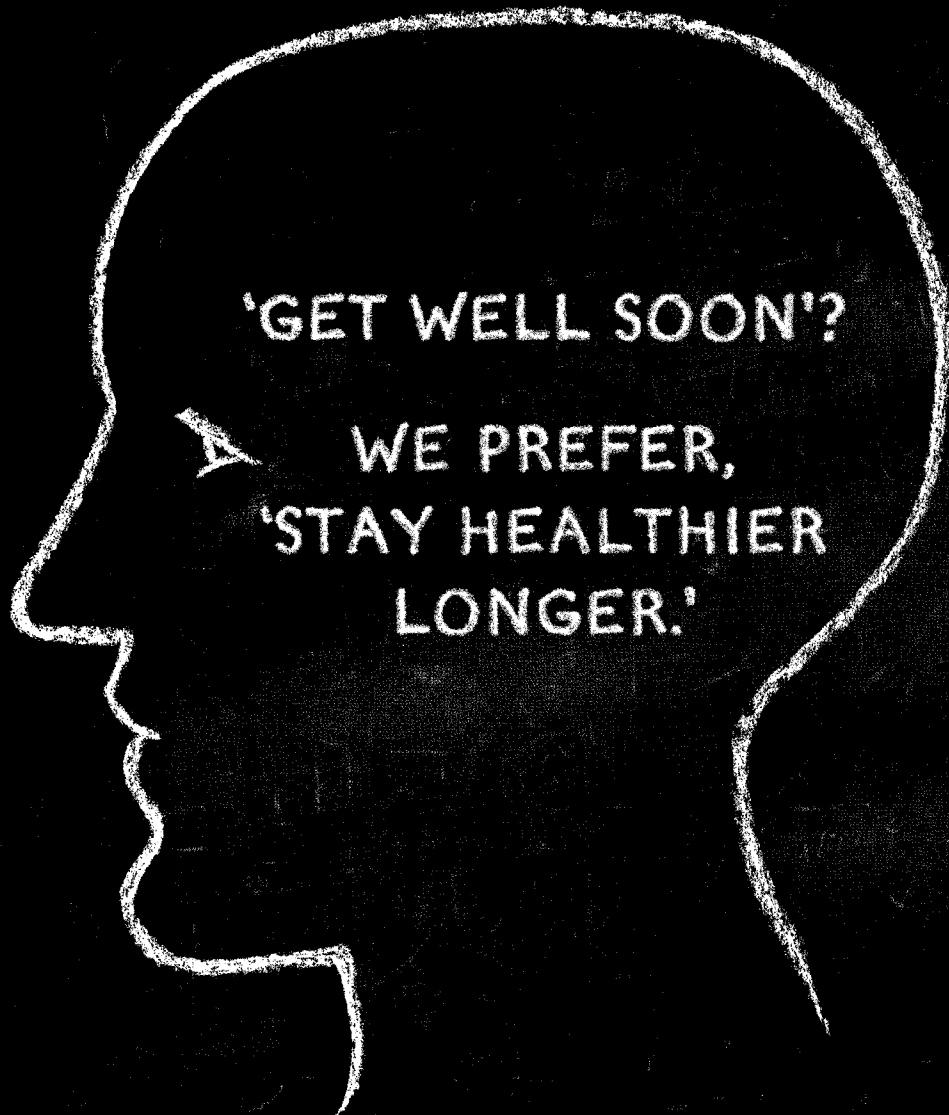


ALAN BRINKLEY

Messiah Complex

The United States is far from the only nation to believe it represents an idea. But America's self-image is more deeply bound up with a sense of having a special place in history than most other nations' are. The American idea has had various emphases, good and bad, over the years: equality, social justice, racial purity, freedom—and in the 20th and 21st centuries in particular, material abundance. But among the most powerful forms of the American idea has been the conviction that the nation has a special, moral mission in the world. America was to be a "city upon a hill," as John Winthrop said of 17th-century Boston, and the "last best hope of man on earth," as Abraham Lincoln said at the time of the Civil War. "We are the pioneers of the world," Herman Melville wrote in 1850. "The political Messiah has ... come in us."

For much of American history, this messianic sense of the nation's destiny was a largely passive one. The United States was to be a model to other nations—a light shining out to a wretched world and inspiring others to lift themselves up. But in the 20th and 21st centuries, as America has ascended to global preeminence, that sense of mission has become linked to a series of attempts—after World War I, World War II, and the attacks of September 11,



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2001—to reshape the world. Despite the many frustrations those efforts have produced—in places such as the Philippines in the early 20th century and Iraq in the early 21st—the idea of American mission has shown remarkable durability.

One could argue that a national idea is an inherently dangerous thing. But given America's powerful traditions, and given its currently unmatched power in the world, there is little reason to believe that this country will abandon its belief that it is destined to lead the world. And yet our present travails suggest that there may be room to redefine how we exercise leadership, that we could embrace elements of the

American idea that have in the past—and might again—make the United States not just a feared military power but an exemplar of ideals of potentially universal appeal: human rights, environmental responsibility, and a commitment to peace and stability as a precondition of progress, and indeed, survival. ▀

Alan Brinkley is the provost, and the Allan Nevins Professor of History, at Columbia University.

T. D. JAKES *The World's Pulse*

The heart of the American idea has always lain open and vulnerable to both the best and worst of this country's

men and women. Our nation's future, as with its past, depends on how we as persons and as a people let this larger heart beat within our own hearts. And the question is: Do we live to serve ourselves alone, or shall our lives bear witness to something larger?

One hundred fifty years ago, it was easier for this country to put its own needs first, middle, and last. But no longer can the world's most prosperous nation pursue happiness irrespective of a global economy, a planet's stewardship, and the health of peoples in country after country after country. Our challenge now is to strengthen ourselves as a nation that is inextricably tied to a world of nations.

Going forward, the challenge is for our decisions to bear the mark of understanding that one nation's heartbeat affects the pulse of every nation. And though the results will never be uniform, and though we will often find our way through trial and error, and though we must learn—and relearn—to proceed with humility, a world's good must be our common goal. ▀

T. D. Jakes, the pastor of The Potter's House in Dallas, is the author of many best-selling books.

SALLY MANN

Sally Mann is a fine-art photographer.



ROBERT CONQUEST *Lethal Certainties*

The American idea, as seen by the founders of *The Atlantic Monthly*, was never an ideological monolith. It was a coming together of a whole culture of pluralism, of the rule of law, of the open society, of the open mind. It was enriched by the immigrant, the South, and the frontier.

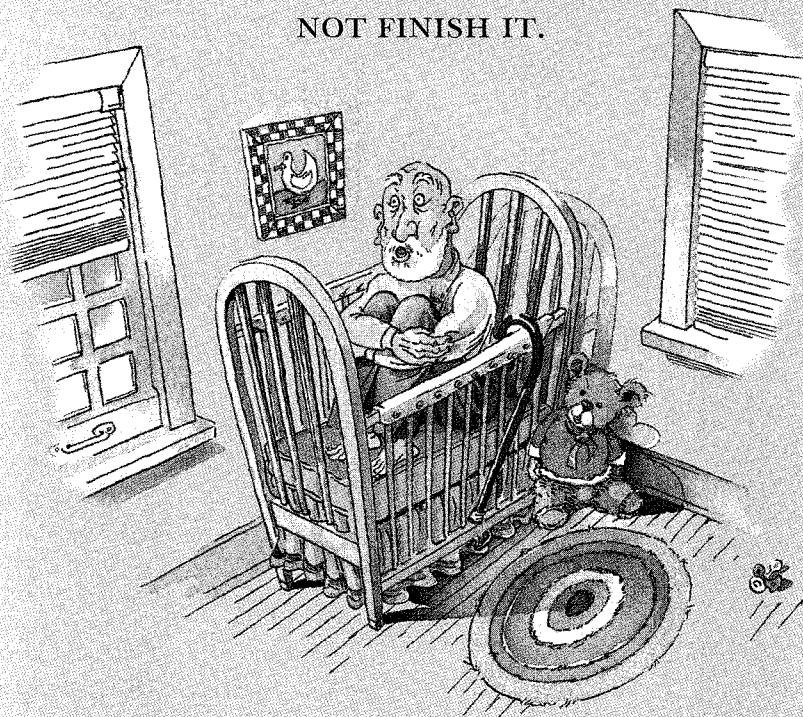
Over the years the idea faced many challenges, both at home and abroad. It was not, with its inherent optimism, wholly suited to grappling with the forces of negation and repression. Woodrow Wilson's League of Nations comes to mind; so does Franklin Roosevelt's misunderstanding of Stalinism.

For the American experiment was faced with and challenged by other experiments. Russia, with its usual bad luck, was infested with an intelligentsia with no tradition of civic experience. It was not

Bald, helpless and broke is how to *start* life.



NOT FINISH IT.



People tend to have a rosy view of their retirement savings. "I'll live off my pension." "I've got equity in my house." "The older you get, the cheaper it is to live." But these innocent assumptions can be quickly shattered. Luckily, Allstate has a few ideas on how America can start getting ready:

1. EXAMINE SOCIAL SECURITY.

Americans will not be able to rely solely on Social Security for a comfortable retirement. In the future, it's projected to cover an increasingly small percentage of the average retirement. There's debate as to whether it should be repaired or replaced. But what's clear is we need to reform Social Security now.

2. BOOST RETIREMENT PLAN ENROLLMENT.

Companies should continue looking for ways to encourage employee participation in 401(k) plans. One proven way to increase retirement savings is through company matches. Another is automatic

enrollment—employees are signed up for savings plans when they join the company, unless they specifically opt out.

3. INCREASE PERSONAL SAVINGS.

Ultimately, everyone is responsible for their own retirement. It's why we support laws that reward people for saving. **Tax-advantaged savings vehicles like annuities and IRAs are two examples of products that can help allay Baby Boomers' biggest fear: living to see the well run dry.**

When planning for retirement, it's time to realize that no one is going to take care of us unless we start taking care of ourselves.

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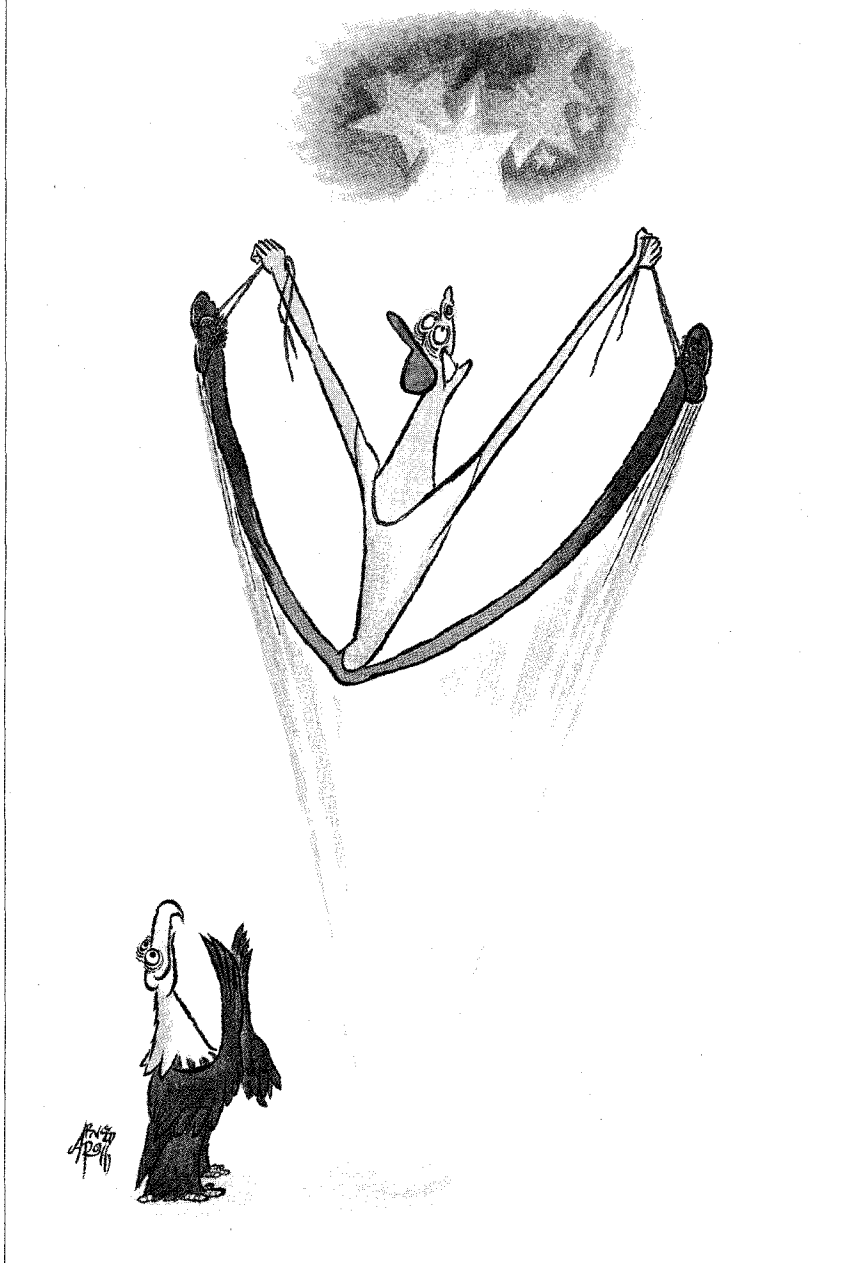
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ARNOLD ROTH

Liberty

Arnold Roth is a cartoonist.



the intellectuals' opinions but their certainties that were so destructive the world over—and these are still smoldering, with Russia itself still not cleared of them.

Today's challenges to the American idea, such as jihadism, are equally driven by lethal certainties. They present what amounts to the anti-American idea. In a less extreme form, a lethal certainty infects our own—and the West's—

public life. The superficial blemishes to be found in any society are equated with the totally negative cancers in the vital organs of our foes. The idea, and the open society, needs a sense of proportion—not always to be found, even among our own equivalent of an intelligentsia. Nor is a far-too-uncritical internationalist sentimentalism absent from our image of today's United Nations.

The idea was, and is, in principle ready to learn from experience. This does not guarantee particular successes. The American idea is always stumbling—but seems strong enough, even so, to prevail and pervade. ▀

Robert Conquest, a historian and poet, is the author of more than 30 books.

ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER

Coming to America

In my second inaugural address, I talked about Republicans and Democrats coming together to create new ideas to meet the challenges we face as a state and a nation—and to compromise for the public good and end the partisan bickering that has created gridlock on far too many issues. It was a concept I called "post-partisanship," and after the speech, something amazing happened: The speech—and the concept—made headlines around the world. Such are our political divisions today that when someone simply talks about working together, it's newsworthy.

People are fed up with politicians who act like party servants rather than public servants. They lose faith in government when issues like health care or immigration reform are debated for years without real progress.

If the United States is to remain great, we must transform our politics. Self-improvement is ingrained in the American spirit, so I believe we will succeed. But we cannot afford to waste any more time.

When I became governor of California, in 2003, our state was in terrible shape. I wanted to fix things as quickly as possible, and, initially, my impatience got the better of me. I contributed to the polarization with an us-versus-them approach on big issues. But after the people made it clear they wanted something different, I began reaching out to everyone I could, regardless of anyone's politics.

We need this same kind of change in Washington; more than two-thirds of Americans are unhappy with the performance of both the White House and Congress. Only after our politicians

acknowledge that divide-and-conquer doesn't work will we start to get the kind of performance the American people want.

I began dreaming of coming to America when I was 10 years old, because it has no rival as a Land of Opportunity. For that to remain the case, our politics need to match the generosity and common sense of the American people. Then we really will be that city upon a hill that John Winthrop and our Founders imagined. ▀

Arnold Schwarzenegger is the governor of California.

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON *Pursuit of Happiness*

As we watch the news in our celebrity-choked culture, it's easy to feel that the grand experiment envisioned by our Founding Alchemists—turning a fizzy mix of freedom and responsibility into societal gold—has spun wildly out of control. The promise of unlimited opportunity has given way to rampant narcissism and misplaced perfectionism (and the disappointed self-loathing that inevitably follows the search for a flawless self).

From the beginning, America has been dedicated to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." But the signers of the Declaration of Independence assumed that some truths did not have to be proved—that some truths were, to borrow a phrase, self-evident. It was self-evident, for example, that the happiness to be pursued was not the blissed-out buzz induced by drugs or shopping sprees. It was the happiness of the Book of Proverbs: "Happy is he that has mercy on the poor." It was the happiness that comes from feeling good by doing good.

Happiness today has been reduced to instant gratification. We search for "happy hours" that leave us stumbling through life; we devour "Happy Meals" that barely nourish the body; we believe the ads that tell us that there is a pill for every ill, and that happiness is just a tablet away.

But there is good news. All around the country, individuals are choosing

to redefine the pursuit of happiness in ways much closer to the original American idea. More young people are volunteering than ever before, and more and more people, young and old, are including service to others in their busy lives. There are, of course, days when the travails of Britney, Lindsay, and Paris dominate the news, but the American idea, embedded deep in our cultural DNA, is inspiring us to pursue a much less shallow happiness. ▀

Arianna Huffington is a syndicated columnist and the co-founder of The Huffington Post.

GREIL MARCUS *Autocracy and Freedom*

This spring, in the *San Francisco Chronicle Magazine*, there was a full-page ad for sheets. It showed a black woman and a white man rolling happily in their bed.

I was born in 1945 in San Francisco. It was only in 1948 that the California Supreme Court struck down the statute forbidding interracial marriage. In my lifetime, where I lived, such an ad might have been cause for prosecution for an offense against public decency.

It is easy today to look at those who presume to rule the nation, and despair. "I don't know what I'd do if Bush gets back in," a young woman says to the 71-year-old Nathan Zuckerman in Philip Roth's new novel, *Exit Ghost*. It's 2004, Election Night. "It'll be the end of the road for a whole way of political life ... I don't think I could live with it." "It's a flexible instrument that we've inherited," Zuckerman says. "It's amazing how much punishment we can take." "Have you ever lived through an election like this one? With the magnitude of this one?" the woman says. "Some," says the old man.

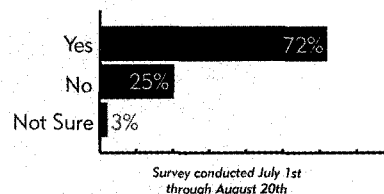
Is it true? It can be hard to wish away the fear that we have reached the limit or gone beyond the point where what is broken can be put back together again. Those who rule are not democrats in any sense. They are autocrats. Government of the people, by the people, for the people is for them an offense, if not a joke. "Many of the people at that convention, for all their flag-waving, hate America,"

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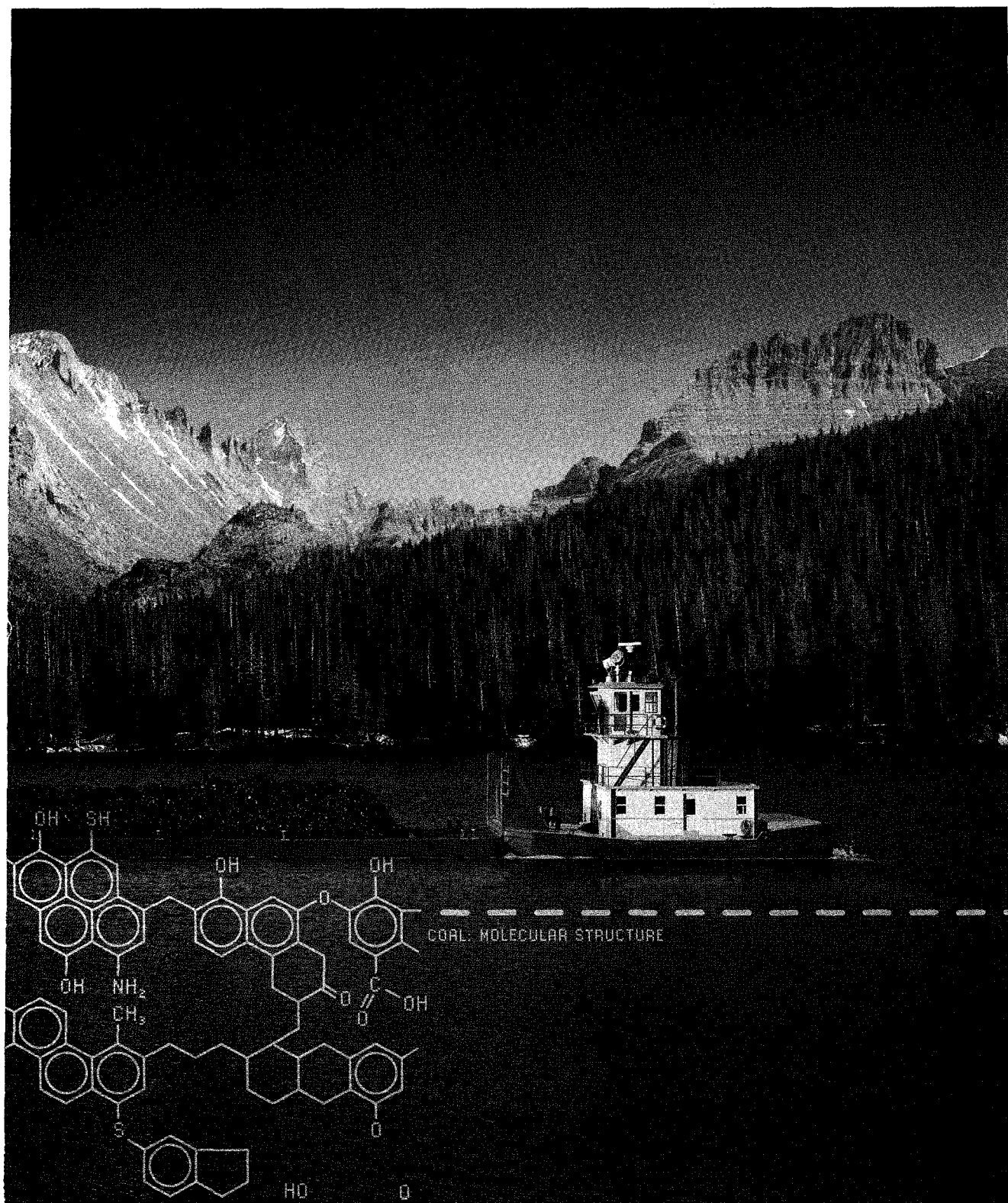
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Paul Krugman wrote in *The New York Times* in 2004, on the occasion of the Republican National Convention in New York. "They want a controlled, monolithic society; they fear and loathe our nation's freedom, diversity and complexity." But this has always been the American fact.

I keep thinking of the woman and the man in the ad for sheets, and I know that by law and by custom—in terms of enfranchisement, fair trials, lynching, restrictive covenants, gender discrimination, abortion rights, censorship, the criminalization and shunning of gay people, and on and on—the United States is more free today than at any time in our history. Throughout the 19th century and well into the 20th, the Bill of Rights was a dead letter; the history of the American 20th century is in many ways the story of the remaking of the nation in the mirror of the Bill of Rights. It is the story of previously enslaved, excluded, marginalized, degraded, and despised people refusing to settle for anything less than full citizenship, and achieving it—a story of people sacrificing their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor to prove that life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness were at once a genie that could never be put back in a bottle and a promise all Americans must keep for themselves.

Today, all of this is up for grabs. That is the nature of America: For every battle carried forward, none is ever settled.

Had those who drew and ratified the Due Process clause of the Fifth Amendment or the Fourteenth Amendment known the components of liberty in its manifold possibilities,

wrote Justice Anthony Kennedy in 2003 in *Lawrence v. Texas*, the decision that invalidated the Texas statute criminalizing sex between men,

they might have been more specific. They did not presume to have this insight. They knew times can blind us to certain truths, and later generations can see that laws once thought necessary and proper in fact serve only to oppress. As the Constitution endures, persons in every generation can invoke its principles in their own search for greater freedom.

That is our birthright and our burden. ▀

Greil Marcus is a cultural critic and the author, most recently, of *The Shape of Things to Come: Prophecy and the American Voice* (2006).

ANNA DEAVERE SMITH *Imagination's End*

The American idea is as promising, imaginative, and full of the unexpected as the land itself. The land represents freedom—the frontier, the ability to make a new future with your own bare hands. Even as I write this, sitting here in front of a bank of mountains and looking up at the very wide blue sky of the American West, anything seems possible. Actually, the environmentalists would say anything is possible—and that the possible is not necessarily a good thing. What is the future of the land?

History is present here, too. When one sees names of these rivers and trails, one is reminded that indigenous Americans once trod on the land here, but that they were killed off, sometimes in the very name of expanding the American idea. The idea, as captured in the land, represents not only freedom but also its opposite. Ancestors were yanked from their own lands in chains and forced to help domesticate this land, so that it would serve some—not all—of the people.

But in living proof of the fortitude of some of our ideas, the chains were broken. Freedom emerged, and support for it has rung forth in monumental times. On January 6, 1941, Franklin Delano Roosevelt spoke about four essential freedoms in the world. (We often strive to plant the seeds of our ideas elsewhere in the world.) On August 28, 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. sang out, "Let freedom ring..."

I don't hear the word *freedom* evoked as imaginatively or with such passion these days.

Another essential element in the American idea is "for all"—as in "justice for all," or "education for all," or "health care for all." Too few of us respond to the notion of "for all"; too few can even imagine "for all." We endanger the sur-

vival of the American idea by that failure of imagination.

The American idea is transforming itself—and not necessarily for the better. Even as I look out at this land, I find myself in doubt, about our environment and our society. Will we be able to ensure a future in which everyone on this land will be able to move from one valley to the next—to climb this mountain or the other one over there? ▀

Anna Deavere Smith is an actress, playwright, and performance artist.

ROBERT PINSKY *Pudd'nheads*

"I sit with Shakespeare and he winces. 'Not.' W. E. B. DuBois begins the peroration of his majestic essay "Of the Training of Black Men" with that line of blank verse embedded in his prose. "I summon Aristotle and Aurelius and what soul I will," he thunders, "and they come all graciously with no scorn nor condescension"—linking freedom with learning, and individual dignity with art.

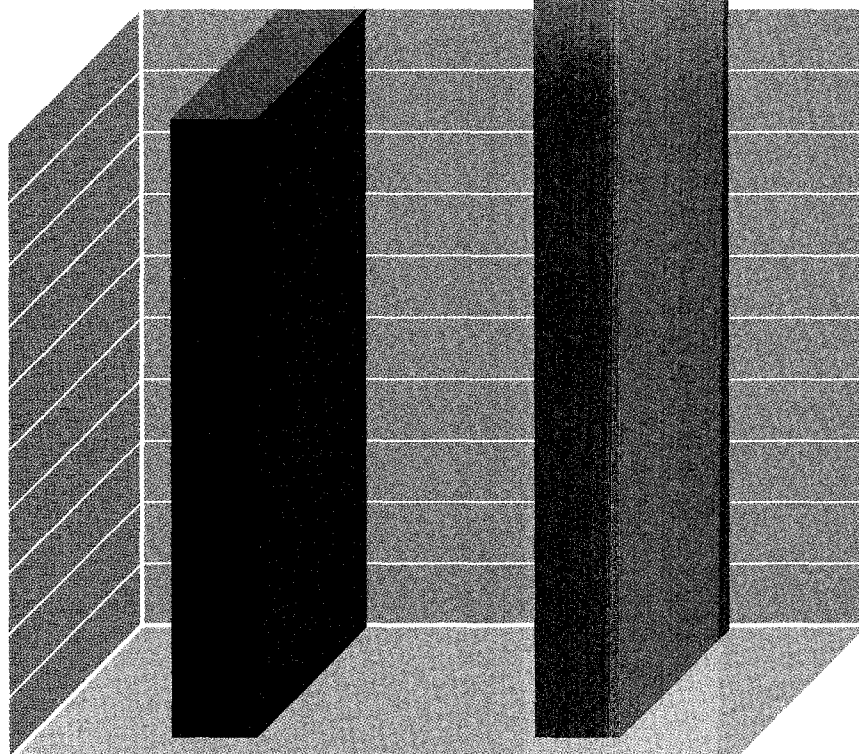
Can it be that our racial divide is only the most egregious instance of our unfinished national work? That under the argument between DuBois and Booker T. Washington about practical training versus the life of the mind lay an even larger, still-urgent American issue?

DuBois's cadences echo Ralph Waldo Emerson, and behind Emerson the Founders—those Enlightenment landowners and merchants educated in the classics, some of them slaveowners, some of them autodidacts, all of them imperfect idealists.

The words *American* and *idea* make a provocative combination: The United States itself can be considered a partly realized idea. A nation not defined by blood or religion must cohere by the force of ideas, or not at all. Sovereignty of the people is an example. So too is equality. Such ideas are made explicit in our governing documents precisely because they are unrealized.

A great surprise of my brief time in Washington was how often members of Congress turned out to be more intelligent

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On one side, the anti-intellectual style of populism; on the other, the transforming success of the GI Bill. To our pride, the prose style of Abraham Lincoln; to our shame, the electoral success of politicians who conceal their intelligence.

Mark Twain's provincials call the wisest man among them, the keeper of truth, "Pudd'nhead." Twain's anticlerical, antiracist, antiroyalist rage implicitly indicts, from beyond the grave, the presidential candidates who "don't believe in evolution."

About half of American college students attend community colleges. Most American children attend public schools. If we fail to recognize them as *our children*—if we deny them the kind of care that phrase implies—then we will have done ourselves great harm, by accepting the gulf of privilege. ▀

Robert Pinsky, who served three terms as the U.S. poet laureate, teaches at Boston University. His most recent collection of poems, *Gulf Music*, has just been published.

SAM HARRIS *God-Drunk Society*

America is now a nation of 300 million souls, wielding more influence than any people in human history—and yet 240 million of these souls apparently believe that Jesus will return someday and orchestrate the end of the world with his magic powers. This hankering for a denominational, spiritual oblivion is not a good bet, much less a useful idea.

And yet, abject superstition of this kind engorges our nation from sea to shining sea. Consequently, the rest of the developed world has learned to view America like a rich, southern auntie: She may be bumptious, bloviating, smarmy, and God-drunk, but she's got all the money; everyone is in her debt, and everyone is hoping that she'll just shut up and go to sleep.

It need not be so. As Islamic medievalism threatens civil society in a hundred

countries, America could easily unite her erstwhile allies in defense of reason. We could also lead the world in wise environmental policies, scientific education, medical research, aid to developing countries, and every other project relevant to the durable welfare of humanity.

Instead, we devote our national conversation to pious phantasmagoria like intelligent design, school prayer, and the problem of gay marriage. We elect presidents and legislators who speak with terrifying certainty about an imaginary God, and with disgraceful ignorance about established science.

This must change. America is now the world's lone superpower. If the idea of "America" is to mean anything at all, Americans have a moral responsibility to become citizens of the 21st century. ▀

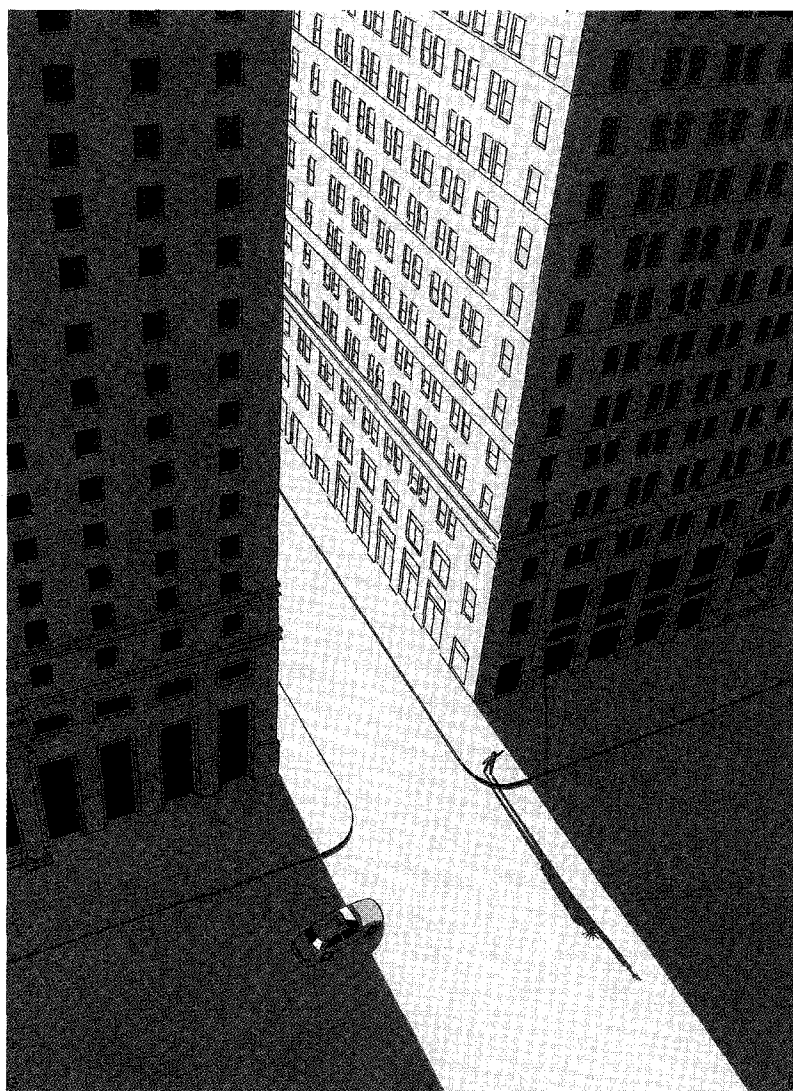
Sam Harris is the author of *The End of Faith* (2004) and *Letter to a Christian Nation* (2006).

TIM LAHAYE *Godless Society*

America's uniqueness is based in the Christian consensus of the Founding Fathers, who penned documents guaranteeing religious and personal freedom for

GUY BILLOUT *American Sunrise*

Guy Billout is an artist, illustrator, and the author of *The Frog Who Wanted to See the Sea* (2007).



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RON HAVIV
Darfuri Girls

Ron Haviv is a photographer and co-founder of the photo agency VII. He is the author of *Blood and Honey: A Balkan War Journal* (2000), and *Afghanistan: On the Road to Kabul* (2002).



all. This nation was not founded by atheists, secularizers, or monarchists who thought the elite educated class should rule over the common people. America's founding was based more on biblical principles than any other nation's on Earth—and that's the main reason this country has been more blessed by God than any other nation in history. No other nation has enjoyed freedom of religion, freedom of electoral choice, and freedom of vocational pursuits for a longer period of time than the United States.

The quest for freedom is what drove the Founding Fathers and what guaranteed that the government should not force any particular religion on its citizens—hence we have no national religion. But as early as 1830, a group of atheists, socialists, Unitarians, and other freethinkers planned the gradual secularization of this nation through control of public education. (Headed by Robert

Owen, the British socialist who came to America to start a colony in New Harmony, Indiana, this group concluded that the American people were not mentally prepared for socialism.) These “friends of education” set out to make education mandatory, write their own curricula, and control the teachers’ colleges.

Who can deny that their basic doctrines of “scientific humanism” or “atheistic humanism” currently dominate public education in America? This, more than any other factor, has relentlessly changed our “Christian consensus” into a “secular consensus,” producing the moral meltdown that is rapidly destroying our people and our nation’s freedoms, integrity, happiness, and even safety.

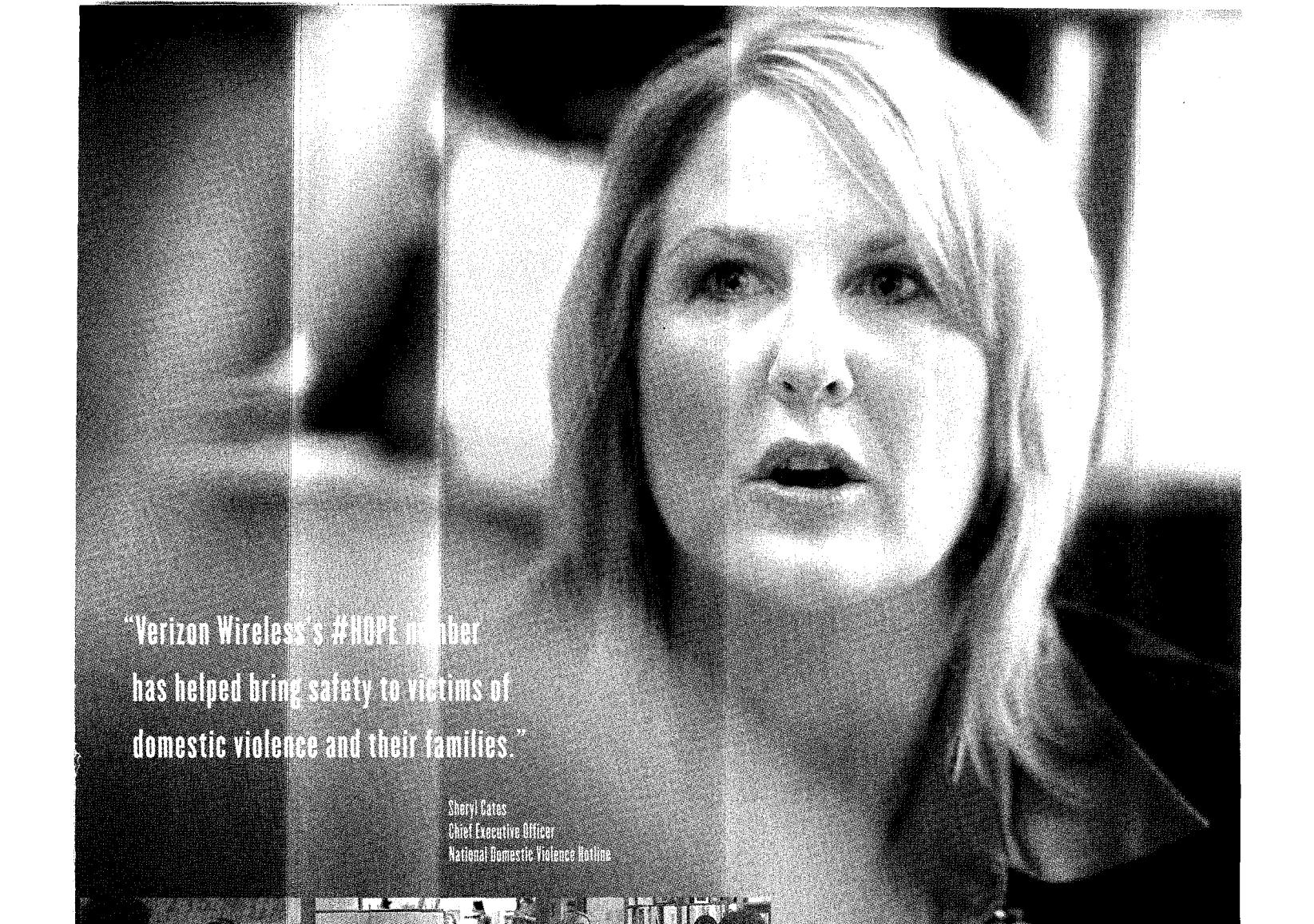
Until we break the secular educational monopoly that currently expels God, Judeo-Christian moral values, and personal accountability from the halls of learning, we will continue to see academic

performance decline and the costs of education increase, to the great detriment of millions of young lives. This could easily be changed if parents were empowered to spend their tax dollars at schools of their choosing—and not at schools chosen by anti-God, anti-Christian humanist educators, like those who now control public education from kindergarten through graduate school. ▀

Tim LaHaye is a minister and the author of more than 50 books, including the best-selling *Left Behind* series.

ERIC SCHLOSSER
The Freak Show

My idea of America was formed by stories about the Founding Fathers that my grandfather told me when I was a boy, by road trips through the Rockies with my parents, by reading almost everything by Mark Twain, by Emerson, Whitman, and Thoreau, especially Whitman,



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ALEX KATZ

Vivien With Baseball Hat

Alex Katz is an artist.



by Kerouac and John Dos Passos, by Frank Capra films, Coppola films, Jimmy Stewart, and *Billy Jack*, by childhood memories of Bobby Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. and their murders, by the war in Vietnam and the protests against it, by Richard Nixon, Spiro Agnew, underground comics, the 1977 New York Yankees, loud music of all kinds, fireworks, hamburgers, and French fries.

The America that I love bears little relation to the freak show now peddled by Hollywood and the cable-news networks. I've had the privilege of spending time with some of the poorest people in this country and some of the richest, and it's left me feeling that we have far too many of both. The best lives, the happiest and most satisfied ones, seem to be lived somewhere in between. I have no tolerance for the anti-Americanism

overseas or the complacency here at home. I worry about the extremes and the extremism that have deeply taken root—the anger, the arrogance, the lack of empathy and compassion. The current state of the union brings to mind Thomas Jefferson's famous remark: "I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just." ■

Eric Schlosser, a National Magazine Award-winning investigative journalist, is the author of *Fast Food Nation* (2001) and *Reefer Madness* (2003).

ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER
Unexceptionalism

The American idea is the idea of a nation founded on a set of universal values—self-evident truths—that are ascribed to all human beings by virtue of their common humanity. It is the idea

of a nation whose destiny was to demonstrate to the peoples of all nations that a government based on these values could in fact succeed. In Daniel Webster's words, on the laying of the cornerstone of the Bunker Hill monument in 1825, America had shown "that with wisdom and knowledge men may govern themselves."

The greatest challenge to this idea today is precisely that the world perceives it as American. The values that our Founders cherished as the universal inheritance of the Enlightenment are increasingly identified as American values—or worse still, as not real values at all, but simply a rhetorical blind for the advance of American power. Perennial claims of American exceptionalism hardly help—how can these values be universal if the United States

Does the Universe have a Purpose?

Unlikely.

Perhaps you hoped for a stronger statement, one way or the other. But as a scientist I don't believe I can make one. While nothing in biology, chemistry, physics, geology, astronomy, or cosmology has ever provided direct evidence of purpose in nature, science can never unambiguously prove that there is no such purpose. As Carl Sagan said, in another context: Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.



Of course, nothing would stop science from uncovering positive evidence of divine guidance and purpose if it were attainable. For example, tomorrow night if we look up at the stars and they have been rearranged into a pattern that reads, "I am here," I think even the most hard-nosed scientific skeptic would suspect something was up.

But no such unambiguous signs have been uncovered among the millions and millions of pieces of data we have gleaned about the natural world over centuries of exploration. And this is precisely why a scientist can conclude that it is very unlikely that there is any divine purpose. If a creator had such a purpose, she could choose to demonstrate it a little more clearly to the inhabitants of her creation...

CONTINUED ONLINE.

Lawrence M. Krauss is a professor of physics and astronomy at Case Western Reserve University and the director of the Center for Education and Research in Cosmology and Astrophysics.

Certainly.

But first let me explain. A common scientific view is that evolution occurs simply because matter obeys some unseen law whereby a simple organism will, if it evolves at all,

become a more complex one. Evolution is thus a blind process without purpose and science will one



day uncover the simple mechanical rules underlying every seeming mystery. Our own lives, therefore, are equally without purpose. There is no place here for the spirit, the immortal soul.

Many people find this hard or impossible to accept. Even that great scientist Albert Einstein sustained a mystical outlook on life that was, he said, constantly renewed from the wonder and humility that filled him when he gazed at the stars...

CONTINUED ONLINE.

Jane Goodall is the founder of the Jane Goodall Institute and a United Nations Messenger of Peace.

Not Sure.

Anyone who expresses a more definitive response to the question is claiming access to knowledge not based on empirical foundations. This remarkably persistent way of thinking, common to most religions and some branches of philosophy, has failed badly in past efforts to understand, and thereby predict the operations of the universe and our place within it.



To assert that the universe has a purpose implies the universe has intent. And intent implies a desired outcome.

But who would do the desiring? And what would a desired outcome be? That carbon-based life is inevitable? Or that sentient primates are life's neurological pinnacle? Are answers to these questions even possible without expressing a

profound bias of human sentiment? Of course humans were not around to ask these questions for 99.9999% of cosmic history. So if the purpose of the universe was to create humans then the cosmos was embarrassingly inefficient about it...

CONTINUED ONLINE.

Neil deGrasse Tyson is an astrophysicist and the director of New York City's Hayden Planetarium.

Yes.

Consider this question: Do the Earth and mankind have a purpose?

Namely, to defeat and rise above our animal natures; to create goodness, beauty, and holiness where only physics and animal life once existed; to create what might be (if we succeed) the only tiny pinprick of goodness in the universe—which is otherwise (so far as we know) morally null and void. If no other such project exists



anywhere in the cosmos, our victory would change the nature of the universe. If there are similar projects elsewhere, more power to them; but our own task remains unchanged.

But why rise above and not blend into nature? Equivalently, from a Western viewpoint: why did the Judeo-Christian tradition replace the pagan idea of gods made in man's image with a revolutionary inversion, man made in God's? Why should we be goaded not to be ourselves but to be better than ourselves?

Why seek goodness?

Because most humans desire goodness...

CONTINUED ONLINE.

David Gelernter is a professor of computer science at Yale University and a national fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

I Hope So.

And if it doesn't, it's up to us to give it one. But first, let us consider these questions: Why the world? Why people? Why did God consider it useful or even good to introduce them into his universal plan?

If we are to believe an old Talmudic legend, these questions are as old as Creation, and perhaps even older. The angels did in fact try to dissuade him. "What good will they be?" asked the Angel of Truth. "People will be unable to keep from lying." The Angel of Peace added, "People will never be able to live in peace without quarreling amongst each other." And so why not simply give up?



Was God wrong not to listen to his celestial counselors' wise warnings? History's answer seems depressing.

It didn't take long for Adam and Eve, in paradise, to disobey divine will. These pitiful parents left their two sons to argue; one became the assassin, the second the victim of the other. Death thereby made its debut into human memory in the form of murder.

Incapable of living in society, people irritated God so much that he ended up lamenting the confidence he had placed in them. Hence the devastating flood. Was it his mistake to start over again?...

CONTINUED ONLINE.

Elie Wiesel is the Andrew W. Mellon Professor in the Humanities and University Professor at Boston University. This essay was translated from the French by Jamie Moore.

To read these essays in their entirety, and to learn more about the authors, visit www.templeton.org/purpose

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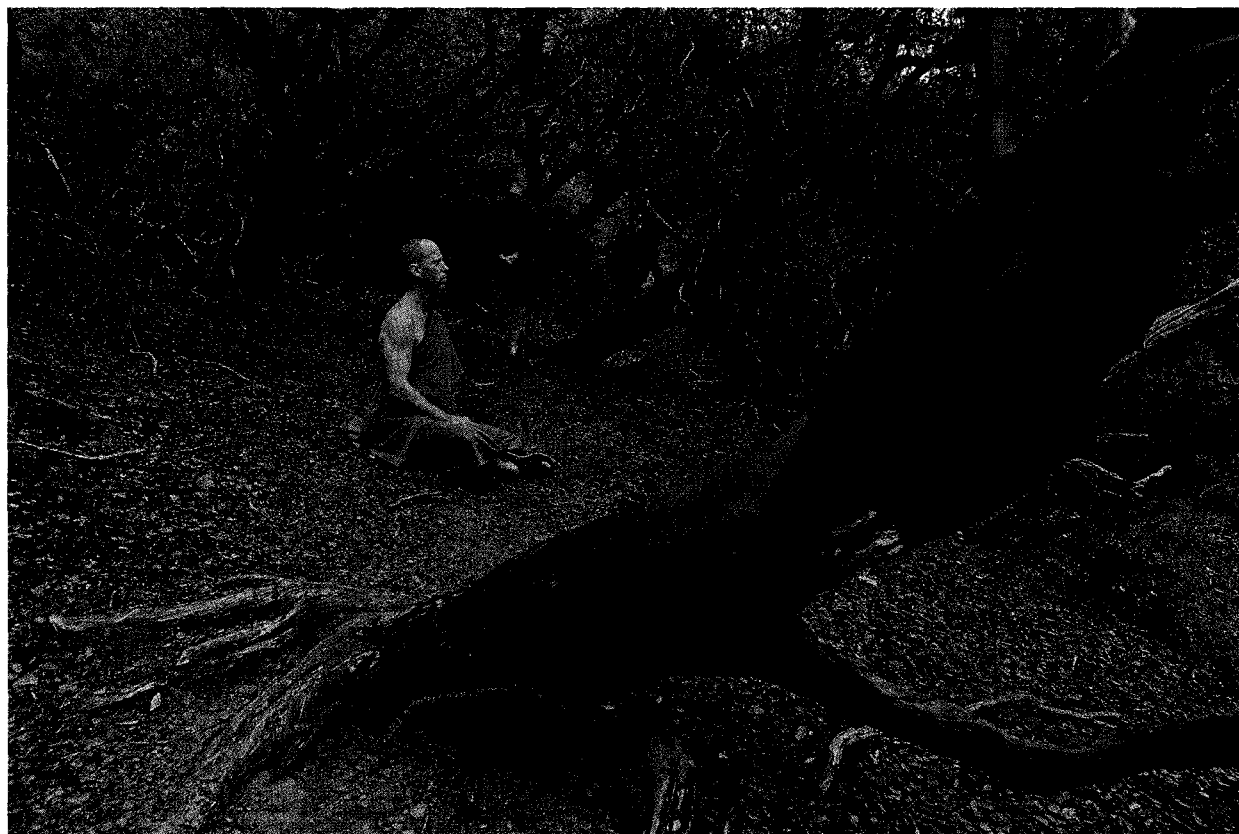
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STEVE McCURRY

Meditating Monk in Forest, Redwood Valley, California, USA, 2004

Steve McCurry is a photojournalist whose latest book is *Looking East* (2006).



continually insists that we are exceptional for embracing them?

The only way to save the American idea is to share it. Our Founders did not see America as exceptional, other than as exceptionally blessed. We were blessed to be the *first* nation to steer a successful course between, in James Madison's view, the extremes of tyranny and direct democracy, but we would fail in our destiny if we proved to be the only such nation. Today we are but one facet of a many-faceted global experiment—a status we should embrace as the hallmark of our initial success.

The American idea was a great idea because it rested on an essential and revolutionary notion of the universality of the human condition. It is still great today, and is now genuinely global. But as the people who have done so much to nurture this idea, we face a paradox. To see it continue to flourish, we have to

accept that it is no longer exclusively—or exceptionally—ours. ▀

Anne-Marie Slaughter, the Bert G. Kerstetter '66 University Professor of Politics and International Affairs at Princeton, is the dean of the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. Her most recent book is *The Idea That Is America: Keeping Faith With Our Values in a Dangerous World* (2007).

ALAN WOLFE

Help Wanted

This country was once needier than it is today. Neediness is not an attractive characteristic, neither of people nor of nations. Yet we were better off wanting things the rest of the world had to offer than we are now, when we need so little from everyone else.

The most obvious thing we once needed was people. Underpopulated, this country extended a welcome to others who not only enriched our economy but strengthened our culture—where would our literature and music be without the

immigrants and their children? More than that, every victim of an oppressive environment who reached these shores expanded the number of liberal democrats in the world by one.

But now we have Lou Dobbs. Forget, if you can, his nativistic populism. This is a man who radiates self-satisfaction. There is no question in his mind that America needs nothing from the rest of the world. In wanting to close the country, Dobbs closes his mind. A society that no longer needs people has no need to question anything it does.

Resistance to immigration is just the most visible form of resistance in general. We seem unwilling to acknowledge a need for compassion, a need for cooperation with our allies, a need to admit error, a need to learn from experience. We believe that strength is more important than humility, failing to understand that humility is a form of strength.



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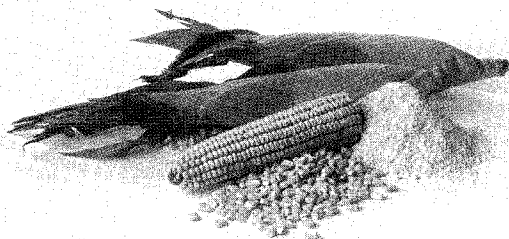
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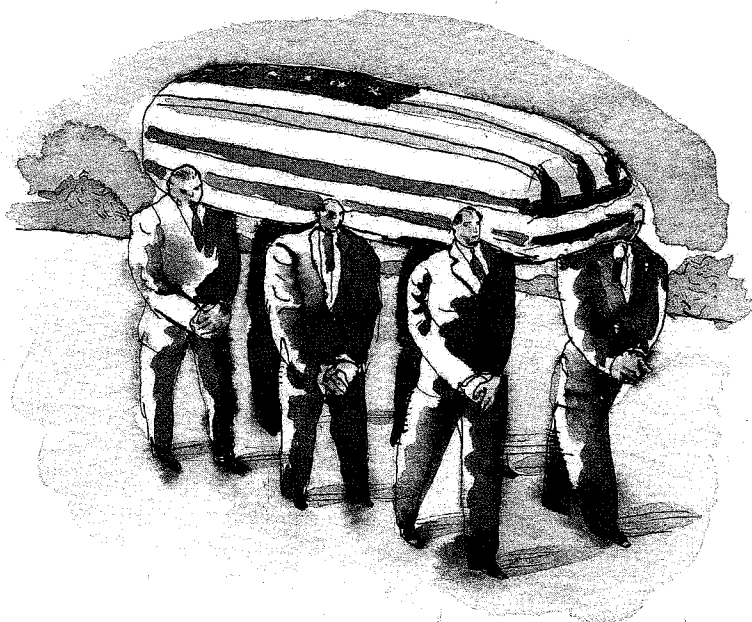


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BARRY BLITT

Barry Blitt is an illustrator.



SUPPORT OUR TROOPS

Self-sufficiency is a wonderful thing, but it comes with a price. Dependency can be crippling, yet it can also be revealing. The American idea worth striving for is not supreme military power—where has that gotten us in Iraq?—nor is it economic autarky, not in this globalized world. The idea for which we should strive is interdependence, recognizing that we need others just as others need us. ▀

Alan Wolfe is a professor of political science and the director of the Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life at Boston College. He is at work on a book about why liberalism matters.

JANET NAPOLITANO
The Arizona Idea

The American idea evokes the concept of frontier, from the physical challenges confronted by the Native Americans to the fear of the unknown experienced by those who first crossed the Atlantic, the Appalachians, the Great Plains, and the Rockies to arrive one day at the shores of the Pacific.

Today, we face a new frontier—one of change and growth, of new ideas and information. This modern frontier also encompasses a sense of endless personal possibility, unconstrained by color, background, religion, caste, or any of the myriad labels we humans use to dehumanize each other. The enemy of the American idea is the small, the petty, the bigoted. The future of the American idea is the frontier notion that with our talents, our skills, and our brains, we can—and will—surmount any challenge put before us.

Rest assured, if you come to Arizona, you'll find the frontier, and the American idea, alive and well here. ▀

Janet Napolitano is the governor of Arizona.

FRANK GEHRY
Building Dreams

The postwar American city grew up as a development free-for-all. Suburbia became possible because of the automobile, and cities like Los Angeles just sprawled. The older American

cities had concentrations of infrastructure that allowed for a New York-style density—an essential hub of urbanity that's been missing from many of our newer cities but that now seems to be the model for the future of all American cities, including Los Angeles. The missing element, in this development free-for-all, has been architecture.

Most of the buildings built would not qualify to be identified as architecture—and yet the world values architecture. People take their vacations to visit architecture of the past. The few great architectural wonders that have been built command tons of attention and generate plenty of revenue for the communities in which they reside. So the question is: Why isn't there a movement that requires real architecture as a priority?

Real architecture tends to have an uplifting effect on the people that experience it, and it creates identifiable icons—like the Sydney Opera House—that brand a city, even a country. Since I'm an architect, the question is perhaps self-serving; but at my age, I don't have too much longer to benefit from the fruits of it. As I think of what's gone on in the years I've been on this planet, I wonder why great architecture isn't considered an important shaper of the American idea. ▀

Frank Gehry is a Pritzker Prize-winning architect.

WILLIAM F. BUCKLEY JR.
A Proposition

The future of the American idea has of course to do with the question of permanency. It is here and there observed that the man who wrote the Declaration of Independence and those who signed it were schooled enough in history to acknowledge, though they did not endorse, the proposition (Lincoln's word) that the ideals hailed in that declaration were adventitious in our history.

I would doubt any claim that the American idea is finally validated by historical and human experience. It is, for men and women of my perspective, judged to be secure in warranting perpetual loyalties. But ours are loyalties to an ideal, not to a revelation, and this must

have been the reason, even if he was not conscious of it, why Lincoln referred to the American "proposition."

By the measure of fragility, surely the doctrine of human equality is most at risk. Yet it is that proposition in American idealism that most sublimely transcends science, asserting as it does a distinction that elevates Homo sapiens beyond the reach of science and evolution.

I plead the continuing relevance of the American idea, but acknowledge that I do so moved mostly by proud possessiveness, and of course grounded in the bulwark of Christian faith. ▀

William F. Buckley Jr. is the founding editor of *National Review*.

STEPHEN BREYER *Wise Constraints*

The Constitution of the United States permits Americans to govern themselves. At its heart lies a certain concept

of democracy, a form of self-government that protects basic human rights from invasion by the majority, assures a degree of equality, and insists upon the rule of law. It avoids concentrating power in too few hands by dividing power, vertically between states and a federal government and horizontally among three federal branches. It translates its ideals into institutions designed to work in practice.

The ideas at the heart of the Constitution are not uniquely American. Our Founders understood French Enlightenment thought, they respected British legal traditions from the Magna Carta onward, and they sought to create institutions that would embody the democratic ideals and republican values of ancient Greece and Rome. What is specially American, however, is the surprising fact that the democratic institutions established by a written Constitution have actually worked (with many ups and downs) over the course of more than

200 years, as the nation has grown by a factor of 75 and now encompasses every race, religion, ethnic background, and conceivable point of view.

This simple fact—that such a large, diverse nation has been able to govern itself democratically for so long—helps to explain why since the end of World War II, many other nations, seeking similar ends, have sought to learn from our experience. They have tried to create their own governmental institutions embodying similar ideals. And many have succeeded. The upshot is that we are not unique; our ideals are not exceptional; and, to everyone's good fortune, our ability to put those ideals into practice, however special it once may have been, has not remained so.

The future of the American constitutional idea, then, is the future of a shared set of ideals. This implies a shared commitment to practices necessary to make any democracy work: conversation, participation, flexibility, and compromise.



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Such a commitment cannot guarantee success in overcoming serious problems: terrorism, environmental degradation, population growth, energy security, and the like. But it does imply a certain attitude toward finding solutions—a willingness to explore options, to search for consensus, and not to be “too sure” of oneself, a habit of mind that Judge Learned Hand once defined as the very “spirit of liberty.”

I believe that America, through choice, and not necessity, will follow this basic approach. I know of none more likely to work. ▢

Stephen Breyer is an associate justice of the United States Supreme Court and the author of *Active Liberty: Interpreting Our Democratic Constitution* (2005).

JUDITH MARTIN *Republic of Manners*

The original American idea was that everyone should be treated with equal respect and dignity. European etiquette was all very well for those snobs and sycophants in class-stratified societies, but it would not do for the proud citizens of an enlightened and free republic. So George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and others put their formidable philosophical powers to work developing a new American etiquette.

This turned out to be easier to proclaim than to practice. General Washington backslid and ruled that his inferiors, the members of the United States Congress, could not answer back when he condescended to address them from his elevated throne with its canopy of crimson damask. Mr. Jefferson slid dangerously forward with what he called “Pell-mell Etiquette,” a system so innocent of rules and distinctions that his guests took to mob action at the White House dinner table. Dr. Franklin happily played the part of the Simple But Honest American, and then used that character to make himself the darling of French aristocratic female society.

By the mid-19th century, a distinctly American style of plain and open manners, which had provoked foreigners to

wonderment (Mr. Tocqueville) and to sneers (Mrs. Trollope), prevailed. Equality did not prevail. Exempt from being treated with respect were African Americans, whether enslaved or free; white men in low-paying jobs; and women who had any jobs at all. The tip-off was being addressed by one’s given name, even in official situations such as court proceedings, while being required to use titles and surnames to address others.

Gradually, these groups and others demanded not just legal rights, but etiquette rights. American manners, now a major influence on much of the modern world, have roughly achieved the goal of equal treatment.

Except—whoops. What happened to the respect and dignity part? ▢

Judith Martin writes Miss Manners columns for United Feature Syndicate and the Microsoft Network, and is the author of more than a dozen books.

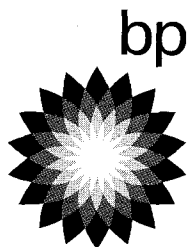
RALPH STEADMAN *American Family*

Ralph Steadman is an artist and illustrator.



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TOM WOLFE

Pell-Mell

Since you asked ... the American idea was born at approximately 5 p.m. on Friday, December 2, 1803, the moment Thomas Jefferson sprang the so-called pell-mell on the new British ambassador, Anthony Merry, at dinner in the White House. Oh, this was no inadvertent faux pas. This was faux pas aforethought. Jefferson obviously *loved* the prospect of dumbfounding the great Brit and leaving him speechless, furious, seething, so burned up that smoke would start coming out of his ears. And all that the pell-mell did.

Jefferson had already tenderized the ambassador three days earlier. Merry was the first foreign diplomat to take up residence in Washington. Accompanied by Secretary of State James Madison, he shows up at the White House wearing a hat with a swooping plume, a ceremonial sword, gold braid, shoes with gleaming buckles—in short, the whole aristocratic European ambassadorial getup—for his formal introduction to the president of the United States. He is immediately baffled. Jefferson doesn't come to greet him in the grand reception hall. Instead, Merry and Madison have to go looking for him ... Bango! All at once they bump into the American head of state in some tiny tunnel-like entryway to his study. What with three men and a sword in it all at once, the space is so congested that Merry has to back himself and his sword out of it just to have room to shake hands. When he shakes hands, he's stunned, appalled: The president of the United States is a very Hogarth of utter slovenliness from his head ... to his torso, clad in a casual workaday outfit thrown together with a complete indifference to appearances and a negligence so perfectly gross, it has to have been actually studied ... down to his feet, which are stuffed, or mostly stuffed, into a pair of down-at-the-heels slippers, literally slippers and literally worn down at the heels in a way that is sheer Gin Lane. "Utter slovenliness," "negligence actually studied," "indifference to appearances," and

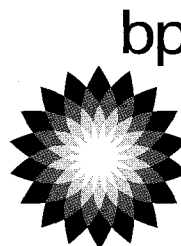
"down at the heels" were Merry's own words in the first of what would become a regular jeremiad of complaints and supplications to Lord Hawkesbury, the foreign secretary, all but coming right out and begging him to break off relations with the United States to protest such pointed insults toward His Majesty's representative. Merry was ready to bail out ... and his wife, a notably not-shy woman née Elizabeth Death (yes), even more so.

The introductory insult was on November 29. Merry and his wife were invited to dinner at the White House on the fateful day, December 2. Merry accepted ... warily ... under the impression that he and his wife would be the guests of honor and that this would be Jefferson's opportunity to make up for his lapse in protocol. The Merrys arrived at 4:30. Along with the other guests, they were assembled for a reception in a drawing room across the hall from the dining room. The Merrys were left flabbergasted and aghast when Jefferson ignored Mrs. Merry and gave his arm to Dolley Madison, who often served as White House hostess for the widowed president. James Madison gave his arm to an already furious Mrs. Merry. The dining room seems to have had a single large, round table. Jefferson took a seat and gave Dolley Madison the ladies' seat of honor on his right. James Madison didn't give Elizabeth Death Merry the seat on the president's other side, however. That went to the Spanish ambassador's wife. The already insulted Mrs. Merry, guest of honor presumptive, took it like a kick in the shin when Madison showed her to an obviously back-of-the-pack seat.

Meantime, her husband's dignity was taking an even worse beating. He was part of an undifferentiated haunch-to-paunch herd of the titled, the untitled, the eminences, and the *not-muches* entering the doorway. They had no choice but to take their seats pell-mell ... *any* seat—first come, first served. Literally *pell-mell* referred to a confused, disorderly crowd in a headlong rush, and that was exactly what it felt

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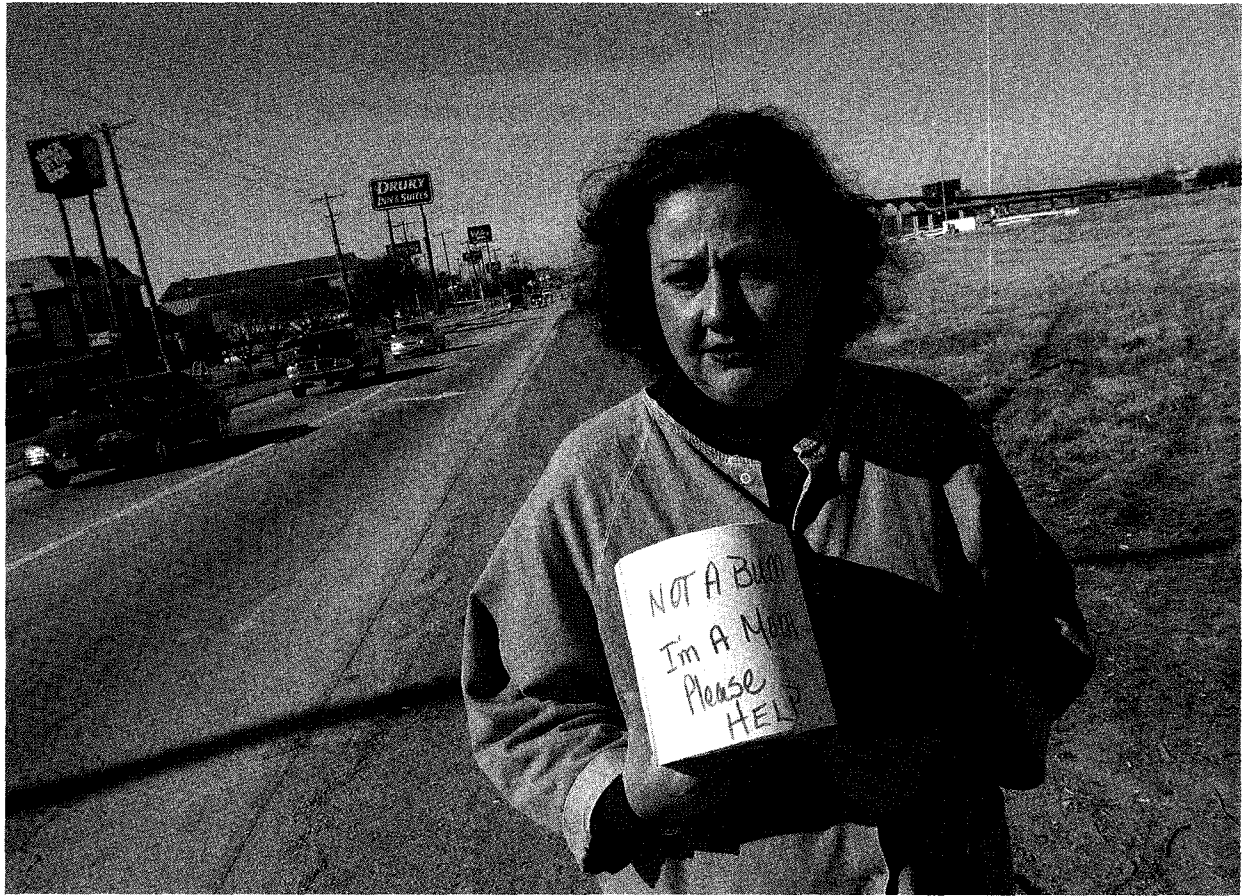
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ED KASHI

Denied: The Crisis of America's Uninsured

Ed Kashi is a photojournalist who has been documenting America's health crisis for the past five years.



like to His Majesty's Ambassador Merry. An outrageous insult was now in progress, but he had only two choices: take a seat or make a scene. So he headed for a chair next to the Spanish ambassador's wife. But before he could get to it, some crude savage who bore the title "Congressman" lunged past him and took it for himself.

Foreign dignitaries, even the Spanish ambassador, were flashing loaded glances at each other—*these Americans—savages!*—and muttering behind the backs of their hands. Merry and his wife vowed never to dine at the White House again—and never did. They did accept an invitation from Secretary of State Madison, who had been the good guy in Jefferson's good-guy/bad-guy team—only to get pell-melled all over again *chez* Madison. For a time, at least, they

refused all invitations from Jefferson's Cabinet members, too. In due course they officially protested their treatment. But Jefferson had such an aristocratic bearing and presence, was from such a prominent family—in America they didn't come any better than the Randolphs of Virginia—was so filthy land-rich, so learned—he spoke Latin as well as French and could read classical Greek as easily as Plato and Aristotle ever did—was so sophisticated and urbane, in fact so cosmopolitan—he had been ambassador to France at the court of Louis XVI—no one could very well write him off as one of ... "these Americans."

In addition to being seven or eight other species of the genus *Genius*, Jefferson proved to be a psychological genius at least a century before all the *-ology* adjectives entered the English

language. He realized that you could write every conceivable radical new freedom into a constitution—freedom of the press and freedom from the heavy hand of an official state religion were very radical notions 218 years ago—and install a democracy with foolproof guarantees, and that still wouldn't be enough to save Americans from the plight of the masses of Europe. After a thousand years or more of rule by kings who were believed to possess divine rights and by hereditary aristocrats believed to possess demigodly rights at least, ordinary citizens in Europe had been irreparably damaged psychologically and would never recover from it. They had lived their lives as if the fix were in, as if there would forever be a certain class of people above them who were predestined to dominate government, industry, all

influential forms of intellectual life, and, needless to say, society.

Even today, in the 21st century, an era of political democracies throughout the West, the great mass of ordinary citizens in Europe remain resigned to their ordinariness because they still feel the presence of "that certain class," that indefinable but nevertheless eternal status stratum forever destined to be their superiors. In England, France, Italy, Germany, rare are the parents who urge their children to live out their dreams and rise as far above their station as they possibly can. As a result, such dreams, if any, don't last long. Only in America do visitors to other people's homes routinely ask their hosts' children, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" In every other country on Earth the question would seem fatuous, since it implies that the child might have a world of choices.

Fortunately for America, as Jefferson saw it, British aristocracy had never taken root here in the colonies. Most British toffs didn't have the faintest urge to depart their country estates and London clubs, their coaches-and-four, their tailors, valets, butlers, ballrooms, peruke-makers, and neck-cloth launders for a wilderness full of painted bow-and-arrow-bearing aborigines ... and no desirable women, unless one were a rather twisted toff who had a thing for granola girls with honest calves and forearms and hands thick as a blacksmith's from hoeing the corn and black-eyed peas. From the very beginning of his political career, Jefferson was determined to make sure no aristocracy, European- or American-born, would ever be established here. *Aristocracy* literally means rule by the best, but he knew the proper word was *plutocracy*, rule by the rich, in this case big landowners who maintained their lordly, demigodly, hereditary rank only by passing their estates down generation after generation—intact—courtesy of the law of entail and the right of primogeniture. As soon as the Revolution was won, Jefferson launched a successful campaign to abolish both. Too bad he couldn't have lived another hundred years to see just

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how efficient his strategy was. In America, rare is the plutocrat whose family wields power and influence beyond the second generation. One need only think of the Vanderbilts, Goulds, Astors, Carnegies, and Mellons. Where are they now? On the letterheads of charitable solicitations, at best. They don't even rise to the eminence of gossip-column boldface any longer. The rare ones have been the Bushes, who have wielded power—a lot of it—into the third generation, and the Rockefellers, who have made it into the fourth ... by a thread, the thread being Senator Jay Rockefeller of West Virginia. But the odds are 2-to-5—you'll have to bet \$5 to win \$2—that within 10 years the last, best hope of even these exceptional families' next generations will be to start climbing the white cliffs of the disease-charity letterheads.

Jefferson created a radically new frame of mind. In a thousand different ways he obliterated the symbols and deferential manners that comprise aristocracy's cardiovascular system. Led by Jefferson, America became a country in which every sign of aristocratic pretensions was systematically uprooted and destroyed. The round table where the Merrys suffered their intolerable humiliation? It has been recorded that Jefferson insisted on round tables for dining because they had no head and no foot, removing any trace of the aristocratic European custom of silently ranking dinner guests by how close to the head of the table they sat. "That certain class" does not exist here psychologically.

Jefferson's pell-mell gave America a mind-set that has never varied. In 1862,

36 years after Jefferson's death, the government began the process of settling our vast, largely uninhabited western territories. Under the terms of the Homestead Act, they *gave it away* by inviting people, *anybody*, to head out into the open country and claim any plot they liked—*Gloriously pell-mell! First come, first served!* Each plot was 160 acres, and it was *yours, free!* By the time of the first Oklahoma Land Rush, in 1889, it had become a literal pell-mell—a confused, disorderly, headlong rush. People lined up on the border of the territory and rushed out into all that free real estate at the sound of a starter gun. Europeans regarded this as more lunacy on the part of ... these Americans ... squandering a stupendous national asset in this childish way on a random mob of nobodies. They could not conceive of the possibility that this might prove to be, in fact, a remarkably stable way of settling the West, of turning settlers into homeowners with a huge stake in making the land productive ... or that it might result, as the British historian Paul Johnson contends, in "the immense benefits of having a free market in land—something which had never before occurred at any time, anywhere in the world." So long as you had made certain required improvements, after five years you could sell all or part of your 160 acres to other people, *any* other people. It's hard to be absolutely sure, but where else in the world could ordinary citizens go out and just like that—*how much you want for it?*—buy themselves a piece of land?

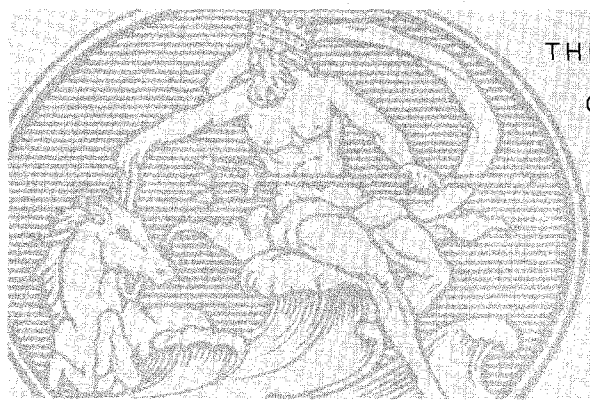
The Jefferson frame of mind, product of one of the most profound political

insights of modern history, has had its challenges in the two centuries since the night Jefferson first sprang the pell-mell upon the old European aristocratic order. But today the conviction that America's limitless freedom and opportunities are for everyone is stronger than ever. Think of just one example from the late 20th century: Only in America could immigrants of many colors from a foreign country with a foreign language and an alien culture—in this case, Cubans—take political control pell-mell via the voting booth of a great metropolis—Miami—in barely more than one generation.

America remains, as it has been from the very beginning, the freest, most open country in the world, encouraging one and all to compete pell-mell for any great goal that exists and to try every sort of innovation, no matter how far-fetched it may seem, in order to achieve it. It is largely this open invitation to ambition that accounts for America's military and economic supremacy and absolute dominance in science, medicine, technology, and every other intellectual pursuit that can be measured objectively. And it *is* absolute.

Yet from our college faculties and "public intellectuals" come the grimmest of warnings. The government has assumed Big Brother powers on the pretext of protecting us from Terror, and the dark night of fascism is descending upon America. As Orwell might have put it, only an idiot or an intellectual could actually believe that. ▀

Tom Wolfe is a novelist and journalist.

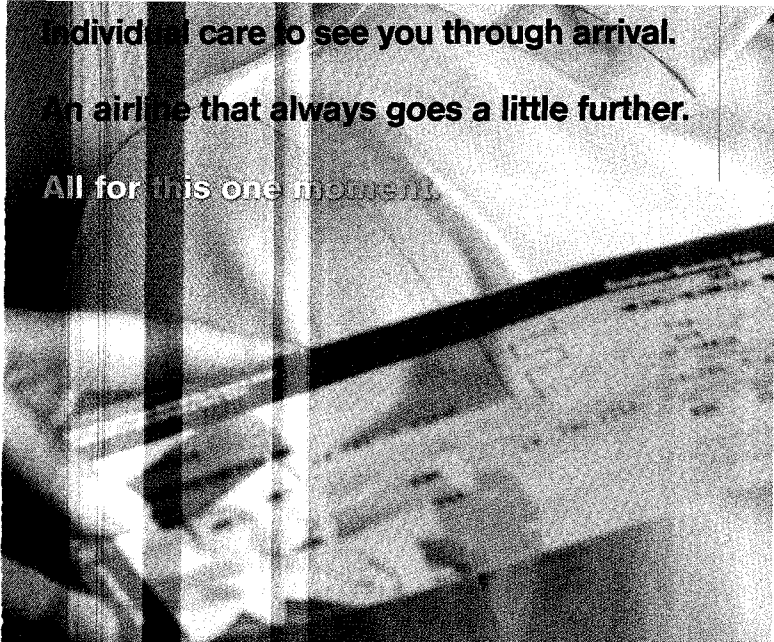


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Grace Notes

CALLE PLÁCIDA LUZ DE LA LUNA

"Street of Placid Moonlight"? Gimme a break.
My aunt's Arizona subdivision
summoned all my Manhattan derision
—how corny, how gringo, how fake!

But when one night I took my daughter
out for a walk, the moon rode high, and lo,
the even sheen it cast across the faux-
adobe houses, and the way it caught her

exuberant small face, upturned in wonderment,
filled me with the kind of mild serenity
that had, coyotelike, eluded me
in every tranquil desert place we went;

not among the ironwoods and saguaros
but within that synthetic so-called estate,
I found calm indifference to the laws of fate
and a sudden lifting of all sorrows.

Past stagey aloes and transplanted mesquites,
beneath a cliché-encrusted moon,
we pottered along, perfectly in tune—
with what happy steps we walked those placid streets.

—BEN DOWNING

Ben Downing is the author of *The Calligraphy Shop* (2003),
a book of poems. He lives in New York.

OCTOBER CROSSING

The woolly bears go cross the road,
their backs of orange and black a sign
of winter's length and strength to come.
They inch across the lanes in fur
fit for a monarch, fox, or star,
as crows descend and yellow leaves
fly out against the twilight breeze.
However accurate the widths
of colors on their prophet backs,
or knowledge of their fate as moths,
they seem intent on crossing this
hard Styx or Jordan to the ditch,
oblivious to the tires' high pitch.

—ROBERT MORGAN

Robert Morgan's recent books include *Boone: A Biography* (2007) and *The Strange Attractor: New and Selected Poems* (2004). He teaches at Cornell University.



DOO-WOP

Does anyone but me ever wonder
where these old doo-wop stars you see
in purple tuxedos with mauve lapels
on public-television marathons
have been between the distant time when they
recorded their hit (usually only one,
one huge one, that being the nature of doo-wop)
and now, when, bathed in limelight and applause,
the intact group re-sings it, just like then?

They have aged with dignity, these men,
usually black, their gray hairdos still conked,
their up-from-the-choir baby faces lined
with wrinkles now, their spectacles a-glimmer
upon their twinkling eyeballs as they hit
the old falsetto notes and thrum-de-hums,
like needles dropped into a groove, the groove
in which both they and we are young again,
the silent years skipped over.

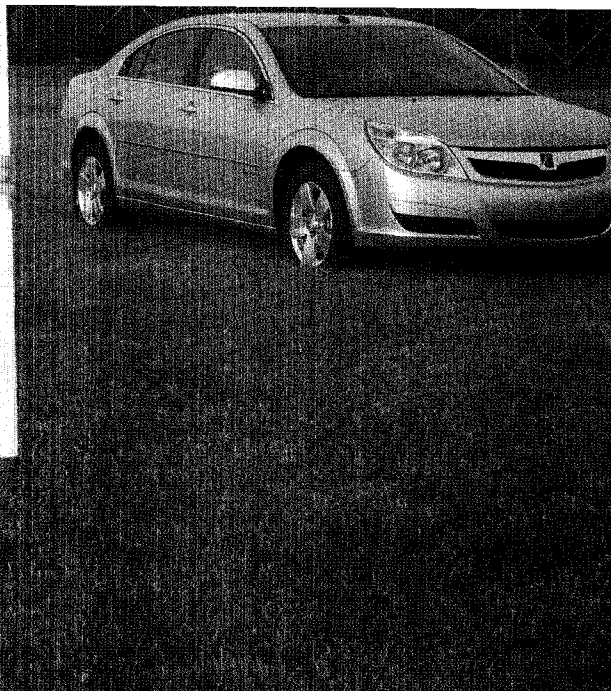
Who knows

what two-bit gigs and muddled post-midnights
they bided their time in? And when at last
the agitated agent's call came through—
the doo-wop generation old enough
and rich enough by now to woo again,
on worthy telethons this time around,
nostalgia generating pledges—why
was not a weathered man of the quartet
deceased or otherwise impaired? How have
they done it, come out whole the other side,
how did they do it, do it still, still doo?

—JOHN UPDIKE

John Updike's recent books include the essay collection *Due Considerations* (2007) and the novel *Terrorist* (2006). He lives in Massachusetts.

Can You Hear This?



What you're hearing on this page is the same thing you would hear from the Saturn Aura Green Line Hybrid as it idles. Nothing. That's when the combustion engine shuts down and the battery power takes over. Quiet. Clean. Fuel efficient. It's as good for the environment as for your pocketbook.

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Lily P. Aldana
Lead Systems Engineer



Neuroscience is confirming what we all suspect:
Multitasking is dumbing us down and driving us crazy.
One man's odyssey through the nightmare of infinite connectivity

BY WALTER KIRN

Illustrations by Istvan Banyai

The Autumn *of the* Multitaskers

I think your suggestion is, Can we do two things at once? Well, we're of the view that we can walk and chew gum at the same time.

—Richard Armitage, deputy secretary of state, on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, June 2, 2004
(Armitage announced his resignation on November 16, 2004.)

To do two things at once is to do neither.

—Publius Syrus, Roman slave, first century B.C.

In the midwestern town where I grew up (a town so small that the phone line on our block was a “party line” well into the 1960s, meaning that we shared it with our neighbors and couldn’t use it while one of them was using it, unless we wanted to quietly listen in—with their permission, naturally, and only if we were feeling awfully lonesome—while they chatted with someone else), there were two skinny brothers in their 30s »



who built a car that could drive into the river and become a fishing boat.

My pals and I thought the car-boat was a wonder. A thing that did one thing but also did another thing—especially the *opposite* thing, but at least an *unrelated* thing—was our idea of a great invention and a bold stride toward the future. Where we got this idea, I'll never know, but it caused us to envision a world to come teeming with crossbred, hyphenated machines. Refrigerator-TV sets. Dishwasher-air conditioners. Table saw-popcorn poppers. Camera-radios.

With that last dumb idea, we were getting close to something, as I've noted every time I've dropped or fumbled my cell phone and snapped a picture of a wall or the middle button of my shirt. Impressive. Ingenious. Yet juvenile. Arbitrary. And why a substandard camera, anyway? Why not an excellent electric razor?

Because (I told myself at the cell-phone store in the winter of 2003, as I handled a feature-laden upgrade that my new contract entitled me to purchase at a deep discount that also included a rebate) there may come a moment on a plane or in a subway station or at a mall when I and the other able-bodied males will be forced to subdue a terrorist, and my color snapshot of his trussed-up body will make the front page of *USA Today* and appear at the left shoulder of all the superstars of cable news.

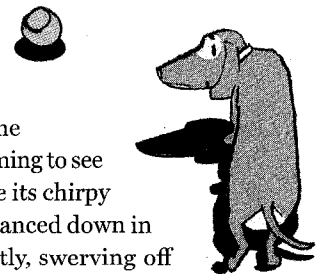
While I waited for my date with citizen-journalist destiny, I took a lot of self-portraits in my Toyota and

forwarded them to a girlfriend in Colorado, who reciprocated from her Jeep. Neither one of us almost died. For months. But then, one night on a snowy two-lane highway, while I was crossing Wyoming to see my girl's real face, my phone made its chirpy you-have-a-picture noise, and I glanced down in its direction while also, apparently, swerving off the pavement and sailing over a steep embankment toward a barbed-wire fence.

It was interesting to me—in retrospect, after having done some reading about the frenzied activity of the multitasking brain—how late in the process my prefrontal cortex, where our cognitive switchboards hide, changed its focus from the silly phone (*Where did it go? Did it slip between the seats? I wonder if this new photo is a nude shot or if it's another one from the topless series that seemed like such a breakthrough a month ago but now I'm getting sick of*) to the important matter of a steel fence post sliding spear-like across my hood ...

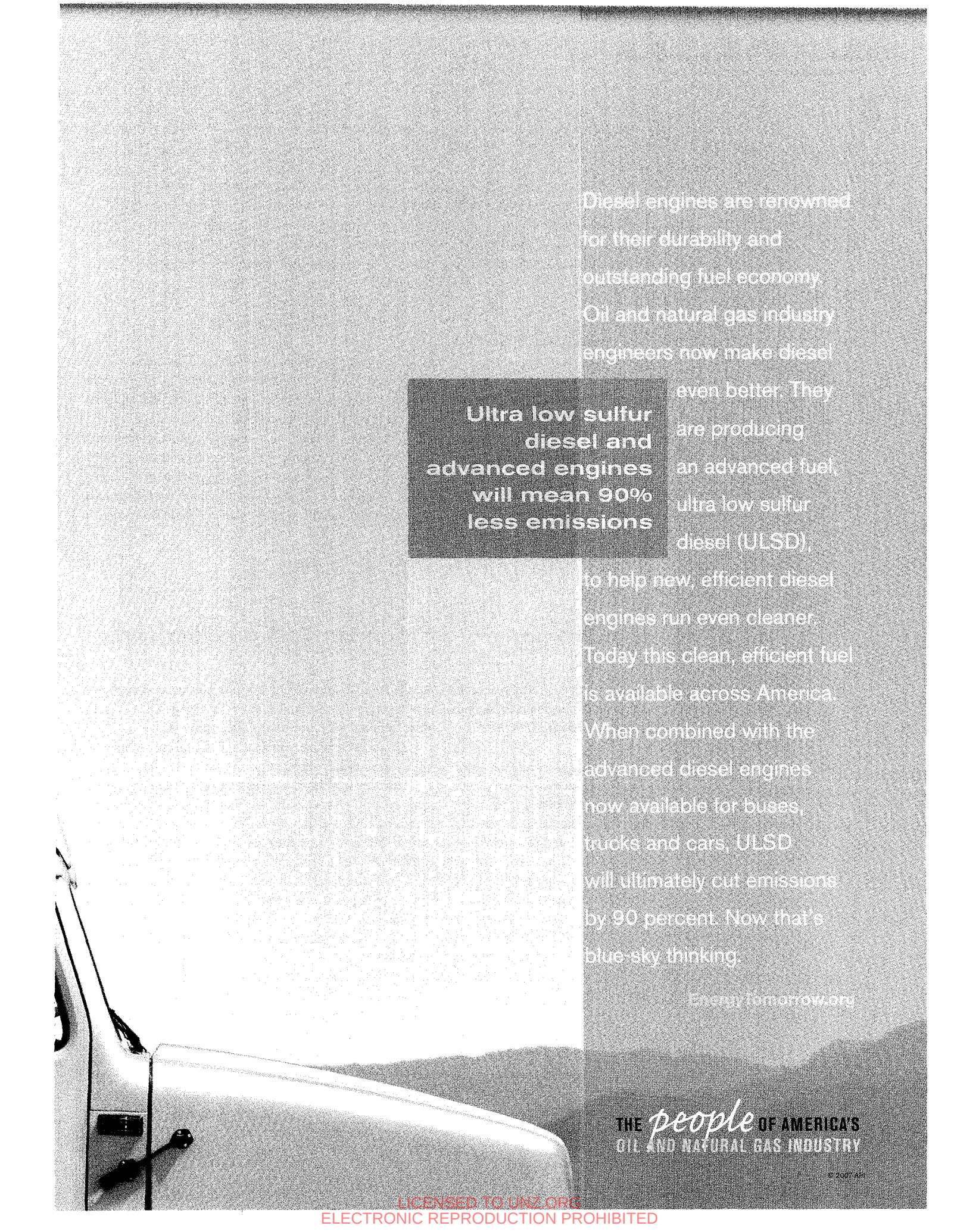
(But her arms are too short to shoot a nude self-portrait with a camera phone. She'd have to do it in a mirror ...)

The laminated windshield glass must have been high quality; the point of the post bounced off it, leaving only a star-shaped surface crack. But I was still barreling toward sagebrush, and who knew what rocks and boulders lay in wait ...



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Then the phone trilled out its normal ringtone.

Five minutes later, I'd driven out of the field and gunned it back up the embankment onto the highway and was proceeding south, heart slowing some, satellite radio tuned to a soft-rock channel called the Heart, which was playing lots of soothing Céline Dion.

"I just had an accident trying to see your picture."

"Will you get here in time to take me out to dinner?"

"I almost died."

"Well, you *sound* fine."

"Fine's not a *sound*."

I never forgave her for that detachment. I never forgave myself for buying a camera phone.

The abiding, distinctive feature of all crashes, whether in stock prices, housing values, or hit-TV-show ratings, is that they startle but don't surprise. When the euphoria subsides, when the volatile graph lines of excitability flatten and then curve down, people realize, collectively and instantly (and not infrequently with some relief), that they've been expecting this correction. The

of our limited human energies in the dream of infinite connectivity. The overdoses, freak-outs, and collapses that converged in the late '60s to wipe out the gains of the wide-eyed optimists who set out to "Be Here Now" but ended up making posters that read "Speed Kills" are finally coming for the wired utopians who strove to "Be Everywhere at Once" but lost a measure of innocence, or should have, when their manic credo convinced us we could fight two wars at the same time.

The Multitasking Crash.

The Attention-Deficit Recession.

We all remember the promises. The slogans. They were all about freedom, liberation. Supposedly we were in handcuffs and wanted out of them. The key that dangled in front of us was a microchip.

"Where do you want to go today?" asked Microsoft in a mid-1990s ad campaign. The suggestion was that there were endless destinations—some geographic, some social, some intellectual—that you could reach in milliseconds by loading the right devices with the right software. It

As the First Law of Multitasking dictates,
any two
or eight
or 16 processes that *can* overlap *must* overlap.

signs were everywhere, the warnings clear, the researchers in rough agreement, and the stories down at the bar and in the office (our own stories included) revealed the same anxieties.

Which explains why the busts and reversals we deem inevitable are also the least preventable, and why they startle us, if briefly, when they come—because they were inevitable for so long that they should have come already. That they haven't, we reason, can mean only one of two things. Thanks to technology or some other magic, we've entered a new age when the laws of cause and effect (as propounded by Isaac Newton and Adam Smith) have yielded to the principle of dream-and-make-it-happen (as manifested by Steve Jobs and Oprah). Either that, or the thing that went up and up and up and hasn't come down, though it should have long ago, is being held aloft by our decision to forget it's up there and to carry on as though it weren't.

But on to the next inevitable contraction that everybody knows is coming, believes should have come a couple of years ago, and suspects can be postponed only if we pay no attention to the matter and stay very, very busy. I mean the end of the decade we may call the Roaring Zeros—these years of overleveraged, overextended, technology-driven, and finally unsustainable investment

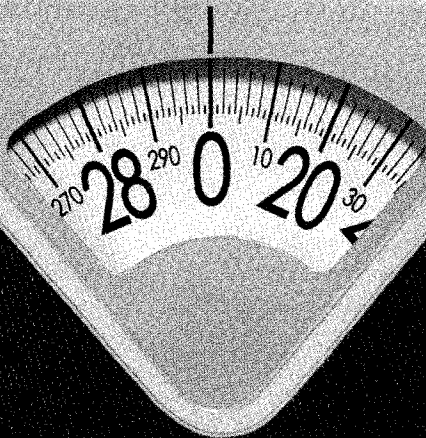
was further insinuated that where you went was purely up to you, not your spouse, your boss, your kids, or your government. Autonomy through automation.

This was the embryonic fallacy that grew up into the monster of multitasking.

Human freedom, as classically defined (to think and act and choose with minimal interference by outside powers), was not a product that firms like Microsoft could offer, but they recast it as something they *could* provide. A product for which they could raise the demand by refining its features, upping its speed, restyling its appearance, and linking it up with all the other products that promised freedom, too, but had replaced it with three inferior substitutes that they could market in its name:

Efficiency, convenience, and mobility.

For proof that these bundled minor virtues don't amount to freedom but are, instead, a formula for a period of mounting frenzy climaxing with a lapse into fatigue, consider that "Where do you want to go today?" was really manipulative advice, not an open question. "Go somewhere now," it strongly recommended, then go somewhere else tomorrow, but always go, go, go—and with our help. But did any rebel reply, "Nowhere. I like it fine right here"? Did anyone boldly ask, "What business



AN OUNCE OF INFORMATION IS WORTH POUNDS OF PREVENTION

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is it of yours?" Was anyone brave enough to say, "Frankly, I want to go back to bed"?

Maybe a few of us. Not enough of us. Everyone else was going places, it seemed, and either we started going places, too—especially to those places that weren't *places* (another word they'd redefined) but were just pictures or documents or videos or boxes on screens where strangers conversed by typing—or else we'd be nowhere (a location once known as "here") doing nothing (an activity formerly labeled "living"). What a waste this would be. What a waste of our new freedom.

Our freedom to stay busy at all hours, at the task—and then the many tasks, and ultimately the multitask—of trying to be free.

While the president continued talking on the phone (Ms. Lewinsky understood that the caller was a Member of Congress or a Senator), she performed oral sex on him.

—The Starr Report, 1998

It isn't working, it never has worked, and though we're still pushing and driving to make it work and puzzled as to why we haven't stopped yet, which makes us think we may go on forever, the stoppage or slowdown is coming nonetheless, and when it does, we'll be startled for a moment, and then we'll acknowledge that, way down deep inside ourselves (a place that we almost forgot even existed), we always knew it *couldn't* work.

The scientists know this too, and they think they know why. Through a variety of experiments, many using functional magnetic resonance imaging to measure brain activity, they've torn the mask off multitasking and revealed its true face, which is blank and pale and drawn.

Multitasking messes with the brain in several ways. At the most basic level, the mental balancing acts that it requires—the constant switching and pivoting—energize regions of the brain that specialize in visual processing and physical coordination and simultaneously appear to shortchange some of the higher areas related to memory and learning. We concentrate on the act of concentration at the expense of whatever it is that we're supposed to be concentrating *on*.

What does this mean in practice? Consider a recent experiment at UCLA, where researchers

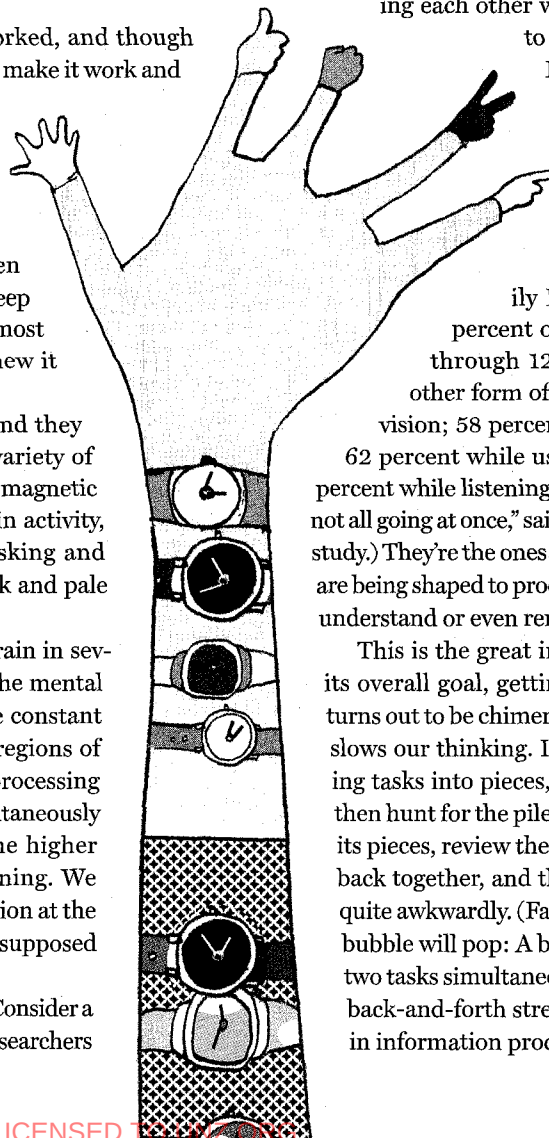
asked a group of 20-somethings to sort index cards in two trials, once in silence and once while simultaneously listening for specific tones in a series of randomly presented sounds. The subjects' brains coped with the additional task by shifting responsibility from the hippocampus—which stores and recalls information—to the striatum, which takes care of rote, repetitive activities. Thanks to this switch, the subjects managed to sort the cards just as well with the musical distraction—but they had a much harder time remembering what, exactly, they'd been sorting once the experiment was over.

Even worse, certain studies find that multitasking boosts the level of stress-related hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline and wears down our systems through biochemical friction, prematurely aging us. In the short term, the confusion, fatigue, and chaos merely hamper our ability to focus and analyze, but in the long term, they may cause it to atrophy.

The next generation, presumably, is the hardest-hit. They're the ones way out there on the cutting edge of the multitasking revolution, texting and instant messaging each other while they download music

to their iPod and update their Facebook page and complete a homework assignment and keep an eye on the episode of *The Hills* flickering on a nearby television. (A recent study from the Kaiser Family Foundation found that 53 percent of students in grades seven through 12 report consuming some other form of media while watching television; 58 percent multitask while reading; 62 percent while using the computer; and 63 percent while listening to music. "I get bored if it's not all going at once," said a 17-year-old quoted in the study.) They're the ones whose still-maturing brains are being shaped to process information rather than understand or even remember it.

This is the great irony of multitasking—that its overall goal, getting more done in less time, turns out to be chimerical. In reality, multitasking slows our thinking. It forces us to chop competing tasks into pieces, set them in different piles, then hunt for the pile we're interested in, pick up its pieces, review the rules for putting the pieces back together, and then attempt to do so, often quite awkwardly. (Fact, and one more reason the bubble will pop: A brain attempting to perform two tasks simultaneously will, because of all the back-and-forth stress, exhibit a substantial lag in information processing.)



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Productive? Efficient? More like running up and down a beach repairing a row of sand castles as the tide comes rolling in and the rain comes pouring down. *Multitasking*, a definition: "The attempt by human beings to operate like computers, often done with the assistance of computers." It begins by giving us more tasks to do, making each task harder to do, and dimming the mental powers required to do them. It finishes by making us forget exactly how on earth we did them (assuming we didn't give up, or "multi-quit"), which makes them harder to do again.

Much of the problem is the metaphor. Or perhaps it's our need for metaphors in general, particularly when the subject is our minds and the comparison seems based on science. In the days of rudimentary chemistry, the mind was thought to be a beaker of swirling volatile essences. Then came classical physical mechanics, and the mind was regarded as a clocklike thing, with springs and wheels. Then it was steam-driven, maybe. A combustion chamber. Then came electricity and Freud, and it was a dynamo of polarized energies—the id charged one way, the superego the other.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

W. E. B. DUBOIS

One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self.

"Strivings of the Negro People," August 1897

Now, in the heyday of the microchip, the brain is a computer. A CPU.

Except that it's not a CPU. It's whatever that thing is that's driven to misconstrue itself—over and over, century after century—as a prototype, rendered in all-too-vulnerable tissue, of our latest marvel of technology. And before the age of modern technology, *theology*. Further back than that, it's hard to voyage, since there was a period, common sense suggests, when we didn't even know we *had* brains. Or minds. Or spirits. Humans just sort of *did* stuff. And what they did was not influenced by metaphors about what they *ought* to be *capable* of doing but very well might not be equipped for (assuming you wanted to do it in the first place), like editing a playlist to e-mail to the lover whose husband you're interviewing on the

phone about the movie he made that you're discussing in the blog entry you're posting tomorrow morning and are one-quarter watching certain parts of as you eat salad and carry on the call.

Would it be possible someday—through drugs, maybe, or esoteric Buddhism, or some profound, postapocalyptic languor—to stop coming up with ideas of what we are and then laboring to live up to them?

The great spooky splendor of the brain, of course, is that no matter what we think it fundamentally resembles—even a small ethereal colosseum where angels smite demons and demons play dead, then suddenly spit fire into the angels' faces—it does a good job, a *great* job, of seeming to resemble it.

For a while.

I do like to read a book while having sex. And talk on the phone. You can get so much done.

—Jennifer Connelly, movie star, 2005

After the near-fatal consequences of my 2003 decision to buy a phone with a feature I didn't need, life went on, and rather rapidly, since multitasking eats up time in the name of saving time, rushing you through your two-year contract cycle and returning you to the company store with a suspicion that you didn't accomplish all you hoped to after your last optimistic, euphoric visit.

"Which of the ones that offer rebates don't have cameras in them?"

"The decent models all do. The best ones now have video capabilities. You can shoot little movies."

I wanted to ask, *Of what? Oncoming barbed wire?* The salesman was a believer, though—a zealot.

"Oh, yeah," he said, "as well as GPS-based, turn-by-turn navigation systems. Which are cool if you drive a lot."

"You have to look down at the screen, though."

"They're paid subscription services, you need to know, but we're giving away the first month free, and even after that, the rates are reasonable."

I shook my head. I was turning down whiz-bang features for the first time, and so had some of my friends, one of whom had sprung for a new BlackBerry that he'd holed up in his office to learn to use. He'd emerged a week later looking demoralized, muttering about getting old, although he'd just turned 34.

"Those little ones there—the ones that aren't so slim, that you give away free."

"That too is an option. Mostly they're aimed at kids, though. Adolescents."

I wanted one anyway. I'd caught air in my Land Cruiser off a sheer embankment, lost my girlfriend, chucked my dream of snapping a hog-tied terrorist, and once, because of another girl—a jealous type who never trusted that



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I was where I said I was—I'd been forced to send on a shot of L.A. palm trees to prove that I was not in Oregon meeting up with yet another girl whom I'd drunk coffee with after a poetry reading and who must have been bombed a few weeks later when she sent me a text message at 3 a.m. while I was sleeping beside the jealous girl. My bedmate heard the ring, crept out of bed, and read the

FROM THE ARCHIVES

JULIA WARD HOWE

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord:
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of
wrath are stored;
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift
sword:
His truth is marching on.

"Battle Hymn of the Republic," February 1862

message, then woke me up and demanded that I explain why it seemed to suggest we'd shared more than double espressos—an effect curiously enhanced by the note's thumb-typed dyslexic style: *Thuoght I saw thoes parkly eyes this aft, that sensaul devilish mouth, and it took me rihgt in again, like vapmires do.*

"I'll take the fat little free one," I told the salesman.

"The thing's inert. It does nothing. It's a pet rock."

I informed him that I was old enough to have actually owned a pet rock once and that I missed it.

Here's the worst of the chilling little thoughts that have come to me during microtasking seize-ups: For every driver who's ever died while talking on a cell phone (researchers at the Harvard Center for Risk Analysis estimate that some 2,600 deaths and 330,000 injuries may be caused by drivers on cell phones each year), there was someone on the other end who, chances are, was too distracted to notice. Too busy cooking, NordicTracking, fluffing up his online dating profile, or—most hauntingly of all, I'd think, for a listener destined to discover that the acoustic chaos he'd interpreted as the other phone going out of range, or perhaps as a network-wide disturbance triggered by a solar flare, was actually a death, a human death, a death he had some role in—sitting on the toilet.

Trading securities.

Or would watching streaming pornography be worse?

Not that both of these activities can't be performed on the same computer screen. And often are—you can bet on it. In bathrooms. Even *airport* bathrooms, on occasion. In

some of which, via radio, the latest business headlines can be monitored, permitting (in theory and therefore in *fact*, because, as the First Law of Multitasking dictates, any two or eight or 16 processes that *can* overlap *must* overlap) the squatting day trader viewing the dirty Webcast (while on the phone with someone, don't forget) to learn that the company he just bought stock in has entered merger talks with *his own employer* and surged almost 20 percent in under three minutes!

"Guess how much richer I've gotten while we've been yakking?" he says into his cell, breaking his own rule about pretending that when he's on the phone, he's on the phone. Exclusively. Fully. With his entire being.

No reply.

Must be driving through a tunnel.

I've been fired, I've been insulted in front of co-workers, but the time I flew thousands of miles to meet a boss who spent our first and only hour together politely nodding at my proposals while thumbing out messages on a new device, whose existence neither of us acknowledged and whose screen he kept tilted so I couldn't see it, still feels, five years later, like the low point of my career.

This is the perfect "one plus one equals three" opportunity.

—Robert Pittman, president and COO of America Online, on the merger between AOL and Time Warner, 2000

There may be a financial cost to multitasking as well. The sum is extremely large and hard to vouch for, the esoteric algorithm that yielded it a puzzle to all but its creator, possibly, but it's one of those figures that's fun to quote in bars.

Six hundred and fifty billion dollars. That's what we might call our National Attention Deficit, according to Jonathan B. Spira, who's the chief analyst at a business-research firm called Basex and has estimated the per annum cost to the economy of multitasking-induced disruptions. (He obtained the figure by surveying office workers across the country, who reported that some 28 percent of their time was wasted dealing with multitasking-related transitions and interruptions.)

That \$650 billion reflects just one year's loss. This means that the total debt is vastly higher, since personal digital assistants (the devices that, in my opinion, turned multitasking from a habit into a pathology, which the advent of Bluetooth then rendered fatal and the spread of wireless broadband made communicable) are several annums old. This puts our shortfall somewhere in the trillions—even before we add in the many billions that vanished when Time Warner and AOL joined their respective

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corporate missions—so ably accomplished when the firms were separate—into one colossal mission impossible.

And don't forget to add Enron to the tab, a company that seemed to master so many enterprises, trading everything from energy to weather futures, that the Wall Street analysts' brains froze up trying to "recontext" (another science term) what looked at first like a capitalist dynamo as the street-corner con that it turned out to be. Reports suggest that the illusion depended nearly as much on cunning set design as it did on phony accounting. The towering stack of Broadway stages that Enron called its headquarters—with its profusion of workstations, trading boards, copiers, speakerphones, fax machines, and shredders—made visiting banker-broker types go snow-blind. When the fraud was exposed, the press accused the moneymen of overestimating Enron. In truth, they'd underestimated Enron, whose hectic multitasking front concealed the managers' Zenlike focus on one proficiency, and only one.

where for several months last year Federline's image was regularly positioned beside the icon I click to get my e-mail. With practice, I learned to sweep past him the way the queen sweeps past her guards, but one afternoon his picture triggered a brainslide that buried half my day.

What the avalanche overwhelmed was a mental function that David E. Meyer, a psychology professor at the University of Michigan, calls "adaptive executive control." Thanks to Federline, I lost my ability, as Meyer would say, to "schedule task processes appropriately" and to "obey instructions about their relative priorities."

Meyer, it's worth noting, is a relative optimist among the researchers studying multitasking, since he's convinced that some people can learn, with enough practice, to perform two tasks simultaneously as successfully as if they were doing them sequentially. But "enough practice" turns out to mean at least 2,000 tries, and I had just the one chance at the cheap fare to San Francisco that I'd turned on my laptop to reserve, only to be distracted by

Efficiency, convenience, and mobility.

These bundled minor virtues don't amount to freedom but are, instead, a formula for a period of mounting frenzy climaxing with a lapse into fatigue.

Hypnotism.

Which is easy to practice on an audience whose brains are already half dormant from the stress of scheduling flights on fractionally owned jets and changing the tilt and speed of treadmills according to the shifting readouts of miniature biofeedback monitors strapped around their upper arms.

What has the madness of multitasking cost us? The better question might be: What hasn't it?

And the IOUs keep coming, signed at the bottom with millions of our names. We issued this currency. We're the Federal Reserve of the attention economy, the central bank of overcommitment, keeping the system liquid with adrenaline. The problem is that we, the bankers, are also the borrowers. That's multitasking for you. It moves in circles. Circles that we run around ourselves, as we try to pay off the debts we owe ourselves with funny money engraved with our own faces.

Here's one item from my ledger:
Cost of pitying Kevin Federline while organizing business trip online and attaching computer peripheral: \$279.

Federline—I know. A mayfly on the multimedia river who, now that he has mated, deserves to break back up into pixels. That he hasn't means pixels are far too cheap and plentiful, particularly on the AOL welcome page,

the picture of Federline winking at me from one browser window over.

The photo, a link explained, was taken while Federline was taping a TV show and happened to peer down at his phone, only to learn that what's-her-hair, his wife, the psycho, bad-mother rehab-escapee (I had last caught up on her misadventures weeks or months before, while waiting out an eBay auction for an auxiliary hard drive "still in box"), had sent him a text message asking for a divorce. Federline's face looked as raw as a freshly unbandaged plastic-surgery patient's, but the aspect of the photo that grabbed me (as the promotional fare hovered in the ether, still unbooked and up for grabs) was the idea I suddenly entertained about its origins. The picture of Federline in cell-phone shock had been snapped on the sly by another phone, I sensed, and possibly by a hanger-on whom Federline regarded as a "bro." It also seemed plausible that after the taping, Federline bought dinner for this Judas—who, in my reconstruction of events, had already beamed the spy shot to a tabloid and been wired big money in return. If so, he was probably richer than Federline, who depended for funds on the wife who'd just dumped him.

This thought sequence caused me to remember the hard drive—still sitting unopened in a closet—that I'd bought in that Internet auction way back when, while catching up on the Hollywood gossip news. Here's the

mental flowchart: Federline dumped > story about his prenuptial with Britney Spears > story was read during eBay auction > time to get some use out of my purchase.

Removing the hard drive from its shell of molded Styrofoam sloppily wrapped in masking tape stirred serious doubts about the seller's claim that the gadget was unused. This put me in a quandary. Should I send the hard drive back? Blackball its seller on a message board? Best to test it first. I rifled through drawers to find the proper cable, plugged the device into a USB port, and only then became aware of the fluorescent Post-it note stuck in the corner of my laptop screen. "Grab discount SF fare," the note read. Where had it gone? Where had I gone, rather? How could a piece of paper in a color specially formulated to signal the brain *Important! Don't Ignore!* be upstaged by a picture of a sad minor celebrity? If the Post-it note had been a road sign warning of a hairpin mountain curve and Federline's photo a radio interview, I and my car would be rolling down a cliff now.

Back to the San Francisco ticket, then. I brought up the main Expedia/Orbitz/Travelocity page and typed in the code for the San Francisco airport, which I couldn't believe I got wrong. To fix it, I was forced to use one of those drop-down alphabetized lists that the highlight line always moves too fast through, meaning I click my mouse several entries too late. Seattle this time. I scrolled back up.

All tickets sold out.

The scientists call this ruinous mental lurching "dual task interference," or just plain bottlenecking. I call it the reason Keven Federline cost me a cheap flight to San Francisco. (It also explains, perhaps, why sexual threesomes are often disappointing.)

I just wish the military understood the concept. They might understand then why "walking and chewing gum" in Afghanistan and Iraq is no way to catch bin Laden.

My hunch is that when we look back on it someday, at our juggling of electronic lives and the array of subtly different personas that each one encourages (we're terse when texting, freewheeling on the phone, and in some

middle state while e-mailing), the spectacle will appear as quaint and stylized as those scenes in old movies of stiff-backed lady operators, hair in bobby pins, rapidly swapping phone jacks from hole to hole as they connect Chicago to Miami, reporter to city desk, businessman to mistress. Such scenes were, for a time, cinematic shorthand for the frenzy of modern life, but then communications technology changed, and those operators lost their jobs.

To us.

We've got to be patient and committed [in Iraq], but we've got to multitask ... We've got to talk about Iran—Iran is more dangerous than Iraq—and we have got to get the job done in Afghanistan and in Pakistan.

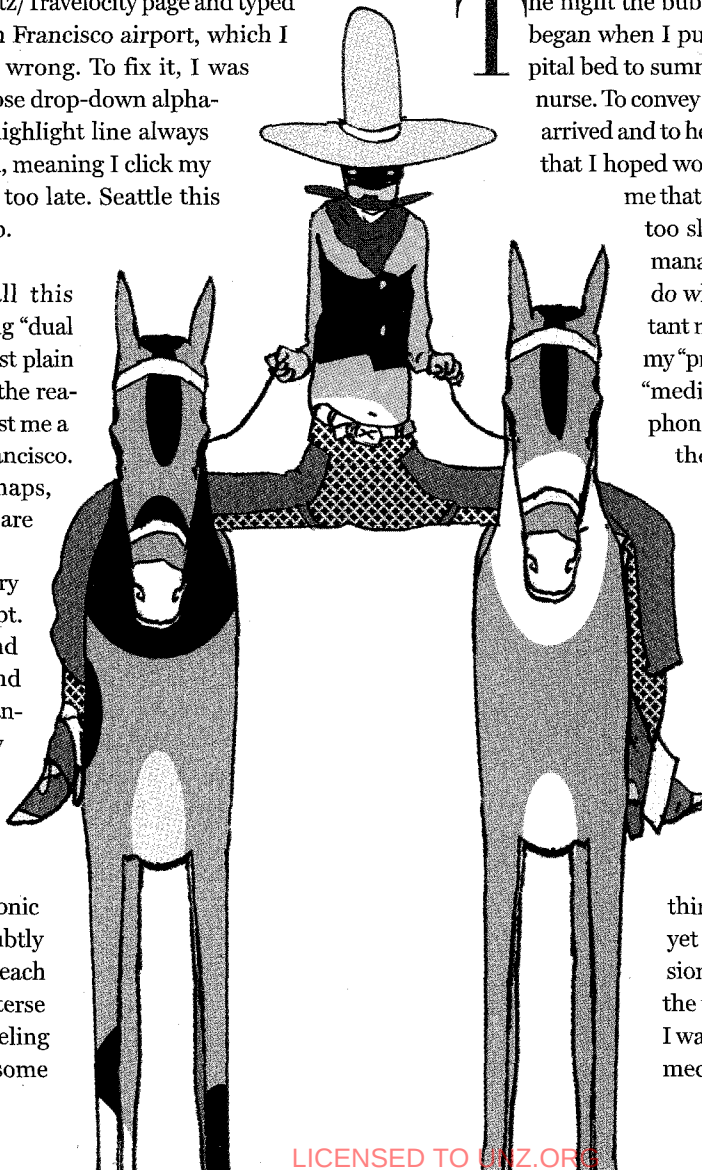
—Rudolph Giuliani, Republican presidential candidate, July 2007

The night the bubble finally popped for me began when I pushed a button on my hospital bed to summon the gray-haired night nurse. To convey my appreciation when she arrived and to help establish a relationship that I hoped would lead her to agree with

me that my morphine drip was far too slow, I did as the gurus of management urge executives to do when they engage in important negotiations. I "reallocated" my "presence" and "enriched" my "medium." I removed my headphones, closed my book, aimed the remote and clicked off the TV, and looked the old woman in the eye.

"What?" she said.

Her question came too quickly. Because of the way the human brain works—always lagging slightly, always falling a bit behind itself when it has to drop many things, one thing at a time, and refocus on a new thing—my attention had not yet caught up with my expression. Also, perhaps because of the way that morphine works, I was unnaturally aware of the mechanisms inside my mind.



I could actually feel the neurological switching, the mental grinding of fine, tiny gears that makes multitasking such an inefficient, slow, error-prone, tiring way to get things done.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

CHARLES ELIOT NORTON

No magazine could have had a more brilliant and prosperous start, or one which gave better promise for continued success. At the outset [*The Atlantic*] depended largely for its cordial reception by the public upon the contributions of writers already eminent, the great writers of the middle of the century. As one by one these lights were extinguished, their places were not supplied by any of equal lustre. But while the higher ranks of literature, especially poetry, were thus depleted, there was a rapid increase of capable writers of abundant knowledge ... A democracy was substituting itself for the older aristocracy and with the usual result: the general level was raised, while but few conspicuous elevations lifted themselves above its surface ... The difference between 1857 and 1907 seems like that between ancient and modern times ... To-day, the writing about material things and of the daily affairs of men ... far outweighs, in quality no less than in quantity, the literature of sentiment and the imagination. The whole spiritual nature of man is finding but little, and for the most part only feeble and unsatisfactory, expression ... But this shall not be forever ... Great harpers shall fill again the seats once occupied by Orpheus and Orion, and the later days of the *Atlantic Monthly*, in that perhaps still distant time, may be no less worthy of fame than when Emerson and Longfellow and Lowell and Whittier and Holmes were its regular contributors.

"The Launching of the Magazine," November 1907

"Still hurts," I finally said. "Wondering if you'd shorten up the intervals." I left out the *I*'s, text message-style, because that's how people in agony communicate. Teenagers, too, but aren't they also in agony, with the shy self-consciousness of partials who don't show all their cards, out of fear that they haven't yet drawn many worth playing?

The nurse made a face that the gurus would call "equivocal"—meaning that it can support conflicting interpretations, even in a real-time, face-to-face, "presence-

rich" exchange—and then glanced down at the iPod on my blanket.

"Music lover?"

"Book on tape," I said.

"You can do those both at once?" She eyed the real book lying on my lap.

"Same one," I said. "I like to double up."

"Why?"

I had no answer. I had a comeback—*Because I can, because it's possible*—but a comeback is just a way to keep things rolling when perhaps they ought to stop. When the nurse looked away and punched in new instructions on the keypad attached to my IV stand, I heard her thinking, *No wonder this guy has kidney stones. No wonder he's so hungry for narcotics*. She turned around in time to see my hands moving from the book they'd just reopened to the tangled wires of the earphones.

"I'm grateful that you came so quickly and showed such understanding," I said, not textishly, relaxing my syntax to suit the expectations of the elderly.

"Maybe more dope will be just the thing," the nurse said, shedding equivocation with every word, as a dreamy warmth spread through my limbs and she soft-stepped out and shut the door. When I woke in the wee hours, my book, in both its forms, had slid off the bed onto the floor, the TV remote was lost among the blankets, and the blinking "sleep" indicator of the laptop computer I've failed to mention (delivered to my bedside by a friend who'd shared my delusion that even 25-bed Montana hospitals must offer wireless Internet these days) was exhaling onto the walls a lovely blue light that tempted me never to boot it up again.

That night, last May, as I drowsed and passed my stones, the mania left me, and it hasn't returned.

What happened to the skinny brothers' car-boat was that it sank the third time they took it fishing. It cracked down the length of its hull, took on water, then nose-dived into the sandy bottom, leaving its revved-up rear propeller sticking up two feet out of the river, furiously churning air until its creators returned in a canoe and whacked it silent with a crowbar.

The catastrophe, visible from half the town, was the talk of the party line that night, with most of the grown-ups joining in one pooled call that was still humming when I was sent to bed.

Where do you want to go today?" Microsoft asked us.

Now that I no longer confuse freedom with speed, convenience, and mobility, my answer would be: "Away. Just away. Someplace where I can think." ▀

Walter Kirn is a novelist and critic who lives in Montana. His latest novel is *The Unbinding* (2006).



e voyage must continue.



In the debate over the war on terror (and just about everything else, too), neocons and liberals, theocons and Christian pacifists, idealists and realists have all called upon the writings of the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr. What does the promiscuous invocation of his work tell us about the man—and about his would-be acolytes?

BY PAUL ELIE

Illustration by Greg Stevenson

A Man for All Reasons

The vital center was not holding. Arthur Schlesinger Jr., bow-tied eminence of American liberalism, stepped in. The “war on terror” was sputtering into its fifth year, and there was no end in sight; Schlesinger was 87, and the hour was getting late. He tapped out an essay for *The New York Times*, confident that the men down in Washington could be set straight if only they had the right guide. Where, he asked, was the wisdom of his old friend Reinhold Niebuhr when the country needed it? “Why, in an age of religiosity, has Niebuhr, the supreme American theologian of the 20th century, dropped out of 21st-century religious discourse?” ¶ Schlesinger was evidently unaware that the Niebuhr revival he called for was »

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already under way. In think tanks, on op-ed pages, and on divinity-school quadrangles, Niebuhr's ideas are more prominent than at any time since his death, in 1971. The seminary professor who was anointed the national conscience during the atomic era is once more a figure whose very name suggests a principled, hardheaded approach to war and peace.

In his lifetime, Niebuhr was a restless and paradoxical figure: an evangelical preacher and the author of the Serenity Prayer, a foe of U.S. isolationism in the 1930s

FROM THE ARCHIVES

REINHOLD NIEBUHR

Our empire was developed almost overnight. At the beginning of the World War we were still in debt to the world ... We wiped out our debt and put the world in our debt ... in little more than a decade ...

We are a business people who know nothing about the intricacies of politics, especially international politics, and in the flush of youthful pride we make no calculations of the reactions to our attitudes in the minds of others.

Our lack of imagination is increased by the fact that we have come into our position of authority too suddenly to adjust ourselves to its responsibilities and that we are geographically too isolated from the world to come into intimate contact with the thought of others. It was only yesterday that we were a youthful nation, conscious of making an adventure in democratic government which the older nations did not quite approve, and we still imagine that it is our virtue rather than our power which the older nations envy ...

"Awkward Imperialists," May 1930

and of U.S. intervention in Vietnam in the 1960s. After his death, *Niebuhrian* became a synonym for American political realism—the school of thought that places national self-interest above idealistic schemes for social reform. But the war on terror has brought Niebuhr's broader vision into focus: not only the struggle between realism and idealism in our foreign affairs, but the ongoing debate over the place of religion in America's sense of itself. The fresh interest in his work, then, ought to be invigorating—a source of clarity and perspective.

It hasn't been. On the contrary, the Niebuhr revival has been perplexing, even bizarre, as people with profoundly divergent views of the war have all claimed Niebuhr as their precursor: bellicose neoconservatives,

chastened "liberal hawks," and the stalwarts of the anti-war left. Inevitably, politicians have taken note, and by now a well-turned Niebuhr reference is the speechwriter's equivalent of a photo op with Bono. In recent months alone, John McCain (in a book) celebrated Niebuhr as a paragon of clarity about the costs of a good war; New York Governor Eliot Spitzer (at the Chautauqua Institution) invoked Niebuhr as a model of the humility lacking in the White House; and Barack Obama (leaving the Senate floor) called Niebuhr "one of [his] favorite philosophers" for his account of "the compelling idea that there's serious evil in the world."

Who's right about Niebuhr, and why does it matter? It matters especially because Niebuhr, better than any contemporary thinker, got to the roots of the conflict between American ideals and their unintended consequences, like those the United States now faces in Iraq. The story of the uses and misuses of his work during the war so far is the story of how the war went wrong; and yet a look at the partial, partisan Niebuhrs that have emerged produces something like a rounded portrait, a view of a man who really does have something essential to tell us about the world and our place in it.

THE REALIST

In 1967, with the country in the midst of what he called "the two main collective moral issues of our day—the civil-rights movement that seeks democratic improvements for our black minority, and opposition to the terrible and mistaken war in Vietnam," Niebuhr looked back at his career in an essay written "from the sidelines," where he had found himself since suffering a stroke in 1952, when he was 59. He recalled his

rather too-hectic activities as a member of the Union Theological Seminary faculty; as weekly circuit rider preaching every Sunday in the colleges of the east; and as a rather polemical journalist who undertook to convert liberal Protestantism from its perfectionist illusions in the interventionist political debates at a time when Hitler threatened the whole of Western culture.

It's a telling piece of self-portraiture, for it suggests that the divergent views of Niebuhr today have their basis in his life—a whirlwind of preaching, speaking, writing, and organizing. Born in 1892, one of four children of a minister in the Deutsche Evangelische Synode von Nord-Amerika, Niebuhr trained for the ministry from age 15, and at 20 took over the pulpit of his boyhood church, in Lincoln, Illinois, after his father died suddenly. He went east to the School of Religion at Yale, then accepted the pastorate of the Bethel Evangelical Church in Detroit. There he began writing polemical articles "in profusion,"

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the biographer Richard Wightman Fox reports, in part to support his mother, who lived with him, and a spendthrift older brother. He “ended up doing a million things at once—he talked to student groups and YMCA meetings, he threw himself into community betterment projects, he became a pamphleteer,” his daughter, Elisabeth Sifton, explained in a 2003 memoir. He became an editorialist for *The Christian Century*, which led to a job offer from Union Theological Seminary in New York; by then, his advocacy on behalf of ill-paid autoworkers in Detroit had thrust him into public life—an agitator in a gray flannel suit, bald and bright-eyed, voluble and inexhaustible.

At Union, Niebuhr taught what he called “applied Christianity,” and insisted that he was not a theologian (perhaps in deference to his younger brother, Helmut Richard, who was). His preoccupation with the workings of society more than with God or the individual put him closer to Max Weber than to Jonathan Edwards. Yet he was suspicious of the abstractions of sociology and politics alike. In one early piece (published in this magazine in 1916) he called war “The Nation’s Crime Against the

state of war.” Peace among nations “is gained by force and is always an uneasy and an unjust one.” “Conflict is inevitable, and ... power must be challenged by power.”

When it was published, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* seemed to describe the conflict between liberalism and radicalism at home; but in the years to follow, it seemed to describe the conflict between civilization and totalitarianism abroad, because Niebuhr, better and earlier than anybody else, had foreseen both the mass hysteria of Nazism and the liberal appeasement of Chamberlain and Roosevelt. But the book’s power is finally a literary power. There’s no grasping for precursors, no revisiting of the debates of the era just past. The allusions are to Augustine, Kant, and the prophets of Israel. Written in the white heat of the Depression, labor strife, Stalinist fervor, and the Weimar meltdown, it has the granite objectivity of the great chronicles of the vanity of human wishes.

Niebuhr’s long perspective—the sense of history being understood from a distance even as it’s happening—was the source of his authority, and he spent the rest of his career spelling out his sense of history in ever-greater

A well-turned Niebuhr reference has become the speechwriter’s equivalent of a photo op with Bono.

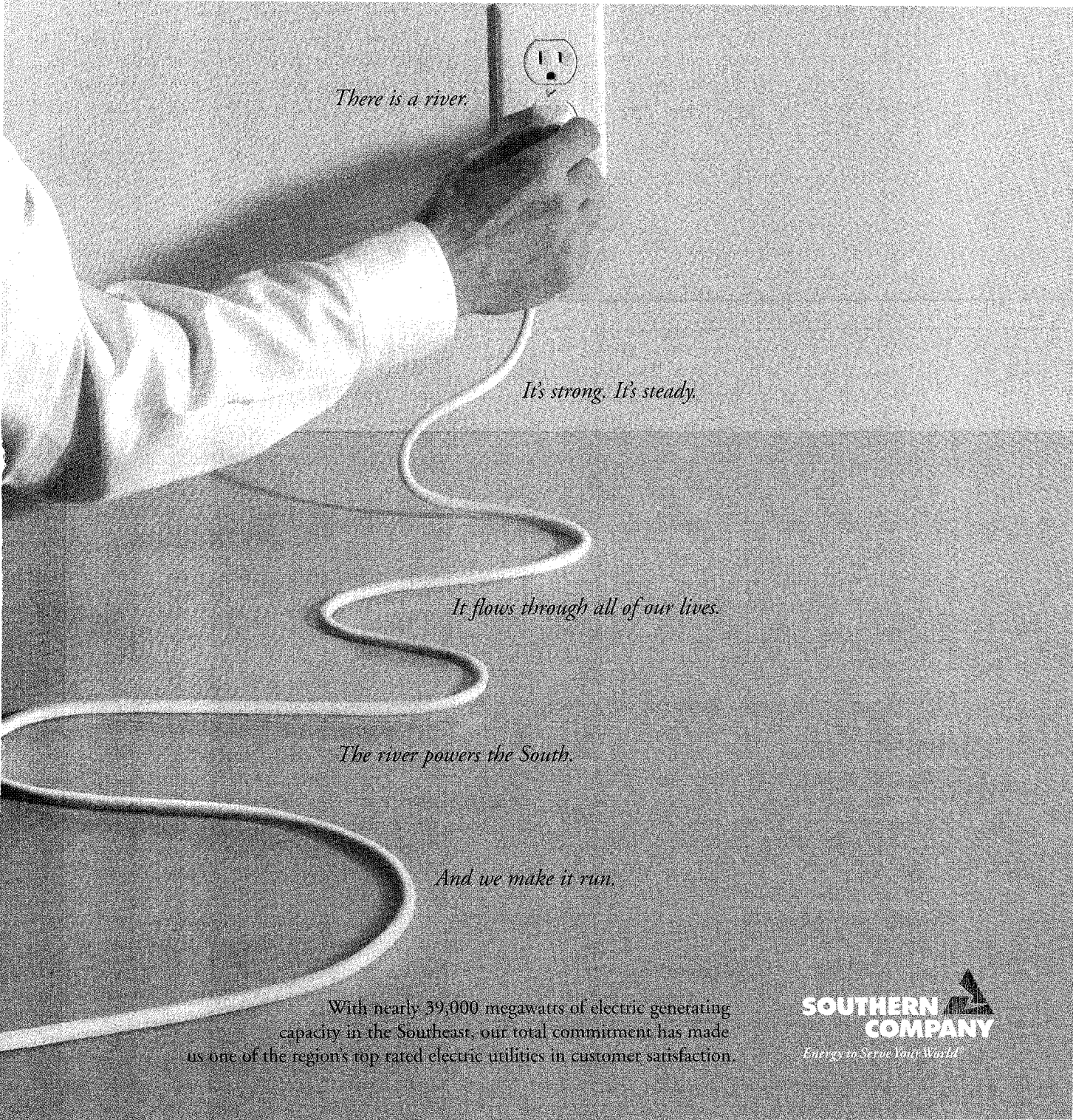
Individual,” because it asked a young man to give “a life of eternal significance for ends that have no eternal value.” After a trip to Germany, where he saw the aftermath of the Great War firsthand, he became a pacifist.

He then became a socialist, too, even running for the New York state Senate in 1930 on the Socialist ticket, but by the mid-’30s, he counted himself a liberal. *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, published in 1932, records both his disillusionment with radicalism and his abiding sense of liberalism’s shortcomings. The book is a quick, deep thrust against the liberal accommodation with evil through naïveté, inaction, and confidence in “reform” rather than the use of force. It’s a devastating critique of the yearning for purity and the radical forms that this yearning takes, whether the Christian wish to purify society of sin or the “rationalist” wish to purify society of religion and other superstitions. Against these he set a Christian realism rooted in his sense of human sinfulness. The human person, in Niebuhr’s account, is self-interested in the extreme. While the individual “moral man” can check his natural selfishness through conscience, self-discipline, and love, social groups—tribes, movements, nations—look out for their own and strive to dominate other groups. Everybody’s motives are always mixed. Order in society is achieved through the threat of force, so “society is in a perpetual

depth. “This drama of human history is indeed partly our construct,” he wrote in 1960, “but it stands under a sovereignty much greater than ours ... a mysterious sovereignty which the prophets are always warning that we must not spell out too much.” Today, his biblical sense of history—of what he calls “the limits of all human striving”—is what makes his account of American strivings still ring true. For him, history isn’t a record of past events but the story of human injustice and divine mercy—the ongoing, little-changing story of “the curious compounds of good and evil in which the actions of the best men and nations abound.”

THE THEOCONSERVATIVE

The biblical sense of history can make Niebuhr seem something other than a liberal. In the ’60s, his religiosity made him suspect on the New Left, and in the years after his death, his work resonated with the thinkers who were turning against that era’s liberal reforms. It was no great surprise when they claimed him posthumously as the “first neoconservative,” in their account of the recovery from the ’60s revels, and then as a precursor to the “theocons,” who emphasized the new conservatism’s roots in religious truths rather than in free trade or small government.



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It was no great surprise, either, that in 2001, the theocons enlisted him to support the war on terror, using his work to vault over Vietnam to an earlier age when the United States had fought a noble war abroad in the defense of freedom at home.

They saw the terrorist attacks (and the swiftness with which some secular liberals said we'd had it coming) as dramatic proof that the United States was embroiled in a religious war, with Christians and Jews on one side and secular liberals and Muslims on the other. It seemed not to matter that the Bush team's plan to remake the political culture of the Middle East was idealist rather than realist. For the theocons, the "preemptive" wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were a Niebuhrian test of America's willingness to rejoin the struggle of good and evil—to set aside "accommodation" and oppose force with force once more.

Six months after 9/11, the historian Wilfred McClay set out the argument with special vigor in a talk to the Family Research Council, in Washington, D.C. McClay is a theocon yeoman with a chair at the University of Tennessee. After learning of the attacks, he told his audience,

to "argue the middle against both ends." Niebuhr, in what became a famous formulation, had written:

Our idealists are divided between those who would renounce the responsibilities of power for the sake of preserving the purity of our soul and those who are ready to cover every ambiguity of good and evil in our actions by the frantic insistence that any measure taken in a good cause must be unequivocally virtuous.

Now Brooks, echoing Niebuhr, set realism against two extreme forms of idealism—"the idealism of noninterventionists, who are embarrassed by power, and the idealism of imperialists, who disguise power as virtue." These were the extremes of Chomsky and Cheney, of Huffington and Halliburton. The effect was to make Brooks's unmistakable support for the war appear the moderate—the Niebuhrian—position.

Brooks concluded that what America needed was a new, Niebuhrian "hawkish left ... a left suspicious of power but willing to use it to defend freedom." He got his wish.

The Niebuhr revival has been bizarre, as people on all sides of the debate over the war on terror have framed their arguments in terms of his.

he'd turned to Niebuhr's *The Irony of American History*, whose themes he synopsized in such a way that they converged neatly with the preemptive-war and global-responsibility themes coming out of the White House. McClay wholly supported the war on terror ("When the President says, 'Let's roll, I'm ready'"), and he was sure that Niebuhr would have, too. "What might we learn from Niebuhr about our current challenges, which are so different from those presented by the Cold War?" he asked rhetorically. "First and foremost, that it is right and just for Christians to support this war. Indeed, they have an obligation to do so." He went on to say that he suspected "Niebuhr might well approve of President Bush's remarkably skillful and sensitive handling of the events of the past few months."

Published in *First Things*, the house organ of the theocons, McClay's talk caught the eye of the commentator David Brooks. In *The Weekly Standard* shortly after the attacks, Brooks had called for a new, Niebuhr-style "humble hawkishness" in the prosecution of the war on terror; in *The Atlantic* 10 months later, he put out the call for a "modern-day Reinhold Niebuhr," a philosopher of power in an age of conflict. Where McClay's Niebuhr was a muscular Christian in a Humvee, ready to roll, Brooks's Niebuhr was "A Man on a Gray Horse"—a sage of ambiguity who liked

But the speed date between liberal pundits and massive military force came with unintended consequences.

A LIBERAL WITH LIMITS

Our age is involved in irony because so many dreams of our nation have been so cruelly refuted by history," Niebuhr wrote in 1951. By then he had the American people as his congregation. He had given the prestigious Gifford Lectures (later published as *The Nature and Destiny of Man*). He had been featured in a *Time* cover story as America's "No. 1 Theologian," the man who had "restored to Protestantism a Christian virility." He had joined Arthur Schlesinger, Eleanor Roosevelt, Walter Reuther, and others in founding Americans for Democratic Action, which sought to claim "the vital center" by cutting ties with the "doughface" sympathizers with communism. He had advised the State Department on the cultural reconstruction of Europe and had even been touted for president. Yet *This Nation Under God*, as he called it, would be his last major book; retitled *The Irony of American History*, it went to press in early 1952, shortly before the stroke from which he never fully recovered.

The irony of American history, as Niebuhr explained it, is that our virtues and our vices are inextricably joined. From the beginning, our national purpose has been "to

make a new beginning in a corrupt world." Our prosperity leads us to believe "that our society is so essentially virtuous that only malice could prompt criticism of any of our actions." Yet our counterparts abroad see us as at once naive and crudely imperialistic, and our power, ironically, has undermined our virtue, for "the same technical efficiency which provided our comforts has also placed us at the center of the tragic developments in world events," bringing about a "historic situation in which the paradise of our domestic security is suspended in a hell of global insecurity."

What should America do about the Soviet threat? The Cold Warrior answered coolly but surely, with Sunday-morning lyricism: In foreign affairs, we should proceed vigorously but cautiously. We should take "morally hazardous actions," risking our purity in the course of "defending freedom against tyranny." Yet we should also recognize that all human motives are mixed and that weapons like the atomic bomb, which grant the United States unprecedented power, also raise the prospect that "we shall cover ourselves with a terrible guilt." So we should "establish community with many nations," be mindful of the unintended consequences of our actions, beware of the pretensions of "our contemporary wise men" to manage history, and let humility guide our actions abroad.

Those are words that Peter Beinart now knows well. As the White House framed the war on terror, he was among the most prominent of the liberal hawks who saw their support for the war as an exorcism of all the evil spirits of American liberalism's recent past. During the long run-up to the war in Iraq, the liberal hawks ransacked modern history, seeking analogies in every U.S. war of the previous hundred years. Then, as it turned out to be a war all its own, they sought an exit strategy in Niebuhr's ironic view of history, for they found themselves covered with guilt.

A graduate of Yale, Beinart went from his Rhodes scholarship at Oxford to *The New Republic*, and was made editor at age 28. Under his direction, the magazine editorialized early and often in support of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. A September 2002 editorial, for example, took a "realist" approach, basing its arguments in the supposedly clear threat posed by Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction. But the magazine's arguments were plainly idealistic salvos in the culture wars in the United States and the Middle East. A February 2003 editorial bemoaned "the intellectual incoherence of the liberal war critics" and argued that recent events had exposed the "moderate anti-war position ... for the abject pacifism it truly is." In *The Washington Post*, Beinart proudly likened the arguments to the arguments the magazine had made in support of the Nicaraguan contras two decades earlier.

This self-righteousness dissipated quickly. As it became clear that no weapons of mass destruction would

be found and no exemplary democracy would flower, liberal hawks from Paul Berman to Jacob Weisberg to Christopher Hitchens stepped back from the brink of certainty and into the world of paradox and ambiguity. *The New Republic* caught the changing mood. "Were We Wrong?" it asked in June 2004, in a full issue devoted to the war. The responses varied, but the theme was one of Niebuhrian "ironic refutations"—the war just hadn't gone the way the liberal hawks thought it would. Beinart confessed that he had been "too bipartisan," claiming he overzealously supported the war in an effort to put his sense of the national

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FREDERICK JACKSON TURNER

For nearly three centuries the dominant fact in American life has been expansion. With the settlement of the Pacific coast and the occupation of the free lands, this movement has come to a check ...

The free lands are gone, the continent is crossed, and all this push and energy is turning into channels of agitation ...

This, then, is the real situation: a people composed of heterogeneous materials, with diverse and conflicting ideals and social interests, having passed from the task of filling up the vacant spaces of the continent, is now thrown back upon itself, and is seeking an equilibrium. The diverse elements are being fused into national unity.

"The Problem of the West," September 1896

interest ahead of his dislike of the Republicans. But when President Bush defeated John Kerry, Beinart changed his tack again. The problem for the Democrats wasn't that they had supported the war in Iraq too eagerly; it was that they hadn't supported the larger war on terror eagerly enough. In a strident postmortem cover story that December, Beinart called on the party to adopt "A Fighting Faith" that would put the struggle against Islamic terrorism at the top of the agenda. To do this, he explained, the party would have to purge itself of the forces on its far left, represented by the filmmaker and author Michael Moore and the Web activist organization MoveOn.org. Beinart's supporting argument was simple: It had worked before. In 1947, he explained, Reinhold Niebuhr and his friends "met at Washington's Willard Hotel to save American liberalism." With the founding of Americans for Democratic Action, they courageously separated themselves from Communists and fellow travelers, bringing on two decades of Democratic clarity of purpose.

Early in 2005, Beinart was offered \$600,000 to expand the article into a book. He left *The New Republic* for the Brookings Institution, but not before propagating the Niebuhr revival in *TNR*'s 90th-anniversary issue. It was a group-therapy effort with a "whither liberalism?" theme, and Niebuhr loomed as a messiah whose return was longed for. E. J. Dionne Jr. argued that what liberalism needed, if it was to recover itself, was a Niebuhrian blend of activist religion and activist politics; a few pages away, Martin Peretz asked: "So who has replaced Niebuhr, the once-commanding tribune to both town and gown? It's as if no one even tries to fill the vacuum."

Beinart tried. By the time his book, called *The Good Fight*, was published, he was a full-on Niebuhrian. "The hero of the book in a way," he would tell an interviewer, "is the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr." There was Niebuhr in *The New York Times Magazine*, exhibit A in Beinart's call

people and nations—but in utility: We should observe limits because they're useful to our national interests.

Truly, this was Niebuhrian realism turned on its head. An idealistic transformation of American domestic politics had been made a precondition for a supposedly realist foreign policy. A vision of the political transformation of Iraq had been replaced by a vision of the political transformation of Washington.

Rhodes scholar + *New Republic* + "Were We Wrong?" + \$600,000 = big target, and when *The Good Fight* was published, the supposedly conflict-averse American left piled on. Michael Tomasky of *The American Prospect* was especially aggressive. He was all for a recovery of the "Niebuhrian doctrine of self-restraint." But would Niebuhr have seen a parallel between the Cold War and the Iraq War? The answer, Tomasky was sure, was "a reverberating, ear-splitting 'no.'" Explaining why in an exchange with

The irony of our history, as Niebuhr explained it, is that our virtues and our vices are inextricably joined.

for "The Rehabilitation of the Cold-War Liberal"; there was *The Irony of American History* on an Amazon list of "Peter Beinart's 10 Books to Read on Liberalism." (The irony was that *The Irony* was out of print.)

The aim in telling the story of the Cold War liberals was to equate "our fight" against Islamic terrorism with "their fight" against totalitarianism, giving liberals a "usable past" to match the conservative one of a Reagan-era restoration. What made Niebuhr the hero of the story was his sense of limits—of "the danger of unrestrained, unreflective power." For Beinart, the policy implications of this "old theme" were clear:

America must recognize its capacity for evil and build the restraints that hold it in check. But it must still act to prevent greater evil. It cannot take refuge in the moral innocence that comes from no meaningful action at all.

So far, so good, but that's not very far. For as it developed, the argument showed the liberal blind spots that Niebuhr had pointed out in *Moral Man and Immoral Society*. No fighting faith, Beinart's usable past is as secular as the glass-box office complexes on K Street, and his Niebuhr is not a teacher of Christian ethics but a "tall, unaffected Midwesterner" who drafts position papers and attends briefings at the State Department. His sense of the need for limits in foreign policy is rooted not (as Niebuhr's was) in human nature and history and religious faith—with all that those tell us about the limitations of

Beinart on *Slate*, he predicted that the war in Iraq "renders the grand visions for liberal internationalism that you and I share useless nullities, for a generation, maybe more."

The exchange had the sense of history that *The Good Fight* lacked, but it showed the perils of finding one's antecedents in the recent American past rather than in the much longer, broader history that Niebuhr claimed as his and ours. And its retrospective tone suggested how fully the left had already left the war behind.

THE VOICE OF EXPERIENCE

Now the antiwar voice was one of experience, the voice for military power one of credulity and naïveté. The Niebuhr who called for the triumph of force over inaction was being supplanted by the Niebuhr who ruefully described "the triumph of experience over dogma." Enter Andrew Bacevich: retired Army colonel, Roman Catholic, contributor to *The American Conservative*. With his crewneck sweaters and helmet of white hair, Bacevich is a right-of-center Howard Dean—an establishment figure who's made his mark by opposing established positions. In a review of *The Good Fight* for *The Nation*, he accused Beinart of casting "hawkish liberals as heroes, doves as fools and conservatives as knaves" in a "largely spurious" allegory—and of "channeling" Niebuhr in a way that amounted to "ritual abuse." "He uses Niebuhr," Bacevich wrote, "much as Jerry Falwell uses Jesus Christ, and just as shamelessly: citing him as an unimpeachable authority and claiming his endorsement, thereby preempting any further discussion."

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"The real Niebuhr," Bacevich confidently went on, didn't worry "about Americans demonstrating their moral superiority"; he worried that they would succumb to temptation and do the wrong thing:

The real Niebuhr did not conceive of history as a narrative of national greatness. Rather than bend the past to suit a particular agenda, liberal or otherwise, he viewed it as beyond our understanding and fraught with paradox.

Bacevich, who teaches at Boston University, characterized Niebuhr as a man like himself: a thinker beyond category who "would likely align himself with those dissidents on the left and the right ... who view as profoundly dangerous the claims of both neoliberals and neoconservatives to understand history's purposes and destination." The emergence of such a figure as a hero in the unequivocally left-of-center, antiwar *Nation* seemed itself paradoxical. But

FROM THE ARCHIVES

ROBERT LOWELL

On a thousand small-town New England greens,
the old white churches hold their air
of sparse, sincere rebellion; frayed flags
quilt the graveyards of the Grand Army of the Republic.

The stone statues of the abstract Union Soldier
grow slimmer and younger each year—
wasp-waisted, they doze over muskets,
and muse through their sideburns.

"For the Union Dead," November 1960

a graver paradox was yet to come. In May, Bacevich's son, Andrew Jr., serving as a first lieutenant in Iraq, was killed by a suicide bomber while on patrol. "I Lost My Son to a War I Oppose," the elder Bacevich wrote in *The Washington Post* over Memorial Day weekend; but the headline went on to say, "We Were Both Doing Our Duty"—at once refuting the arguments of the people who claimed his opposition to the war had helped the enemy kill his son and acknowledging that for every family with a member in Iraq, death in battle is the cruelest of unintended consequences.

THE SAGE OF NONVIOLENCE

"The beginning of wisdom," Niebuhr wrote, "lies in recognizing that history cannot be coerced." But history can be changed by the force of righteousness; of this Niebuhr was sure, and of this Martin Luther

King Jr. is modern proof. When King read *Moral Man and Immoral Society* in divinity school in 1950, he was struck both by Niebuhr's frank appraisal of the role of power in society and by his application of it to race relations in the South. Having rejected pacifism, Niebuhr made his case for Christian participation in war by distinguishing between "non-resistance" and "non-violent resistance." He argued that because Jesus counseled nonresistance (urging his followers to turn the other cheek), nonviolent resistance was no more faithful to the Gospel than violence—after all, it *did* resist. Nor was it practical, for it ceded all force to people who would use it without scruple. But Niebuhr, with characteristic subtlety, saw some merit in nonviolence even so. In peacetime, he allowed, nonviolent resistance could be an effective way to close the gap between the powerful and the powerless—as Gandhi had recently shown with his campaign of strikes and boycotts against the British in India. He added:

The emancipation of the Negro race in America probably waits upon the adequate development of this kind of social and political strategy ... The white race in America will not admit the Negro to equal rights if it is not forced to do so. Upon that point one may speak with a dogmatism which all history justifies.

In jail in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963, King drew on the passage from memory in his open letter to eight of the city's white clergymen, recalling:

As Reinhold Niebuhr has reminded us, groups tend to be more immoral than individuals. We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed.

In a striking paradox, King had identified the philosopher of armed conflict with the cause of nonviolence.

When Stanley Hauerwas found himself "silenced" during the war on terror, he too sat down and wrote an open letter, and he too had Niebuhr in mind. Hauerwas, who teaches in the divinity school at Duke University, is the most prominent voice for Christian pacifism in America. A September 2001 issue of *Time* declared him "America's Best Theologian." Then the terrorists struck. A *First Things* editorial, "In a Time of War," set out the journal's stance. The target was recognizably Hauerwas, a member of the *First Things* editorial board, and the rhetoric was recognizably that of the editor in chief, Richard John Neuhaus, a Catholic priest who is to theoconservatism what Hauerwas is to pacifism. Support for the war, Neuhaus proposed, was not a matter of debate "between idealism and realism, nor between moral purity and moral compromise"; it was a matter of duty. Anyone with a "decent

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respect for mankind" would join the war effort. As for the "fraudulent" pacifists who promoted "nonviolent resistance," they were living in "an unreal world of utopian fantasy that has no basis in Christian faith." As opponents of military force, they should have no say "in the discussion about how military force should be used."

"I have been silenced," Hauerwas responded in a letter to the editors. He found it "almost beyond belief" that *First Things* had resorted to "the Niebuhrian distinction between nonviolent resistance and non-resistance in order to silence the pacifist voice." As he saw it, that distinction affected more than pacifists; it forced all Christians to "leave Jesus behind when they come to the political realm" and reconcile themselves to "the order of disguised violence"—the world of legislatures and politics that leads, inevitably, to the order of undisguised violence that is war. His point made, he resigned from the editorial board.

Niebuhr's "hold on Neuhaus' soul seems permanent," Hauerwas later wrote, and so it is on Hauerwas's. It was from Niebuhr, he says, that he learned "that if you desire justice you had better be ready to kill someone along the way." But an encounter with the work of the Mennonite

Published in a book shortly after the terrorist attacks, Hauerwas's challenge to Niebuhr could be seen as a critique of the Bush administration and of the close ties between Christianity and patriotism. Six years into the war, Hauerwas is firmer than ever in his conviction that Niebuhrian realism is not realistic. As he sees it, the war on terrorism is not only not winnable; it isn't even a war, for it has no clear enemy, purpose, or end. As in all wars, however, violence and the threat of violence are everywhere, from Baghdad to Abu Ghraib to Guantánamo. The ubiquity of violence, he insists, shows the emptiness of Niebuhrian realism, for all Niebuhr's further arguments lead to the crude conclusion that "the nations with the largest armies get to determine what counts for 'justice'"; and the diversity of Niebuhrian opinions shows that Niebuhr has no clear answers to give us.

A 'REALIST OF DISTANCES'

In 1943, with the Axis powers still strong in Europe and the Pacific, Niebuhr began to plan for the postwar situation, sketching out a peacetime alliance that would represent a mean between the extremes of anarchy and world government. As the military intervention he'd sought was becoming a fact on the ground, making American predominance in world affairs felt as never before, he was looking ahead to a time when the United States would need to "establish community with many nations."

It was at this time that he wrote the Serenity Prayer, the 33 words now uttered countless times each day in 12-step recovery programs worldwide: "God, give us grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things that should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other."

More than a prayer, this was Niebuhr's prescription for action in the new era waiting on the far side of the war. He foresaw that the American struggle in the postwar years would be a struggle with our addiction to power, and that our national story would be a story of our efforts to distinguish between the courageous and the foolish uses of that power—a story of our reluctant recognition that power can bring about necessary change, but that it can also have brutal unintended consequences. Moreover, he saw that distinguishing the one from the other would call for wisdom, a quality born of "the triumph of experience over dogma."

Such wisdom is needed now more than at any time since 1945. The war in Iraq is far from over, no matter what any politician says. The forces of globalization and terrorism have made the United States at once more powerful and more vulnerable than ever before, bringing the "hell of global insecurity" to our office towers and mailboxes. With the so-called American Century safely behind us, we can once more begin to see that we are just one nation among many, for better and for worse.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

RANDOLPH S. BOURNE

America is coming to be, not a nationality but a trans-nationality, a weaving back and forth, with the other lands, of many threads of all sizes and colors. Any movement which attempts to thwart this weaving, or to dye the fabric any one color, or disentangle the threads of the strands, is false to this cosmopolitan vision.

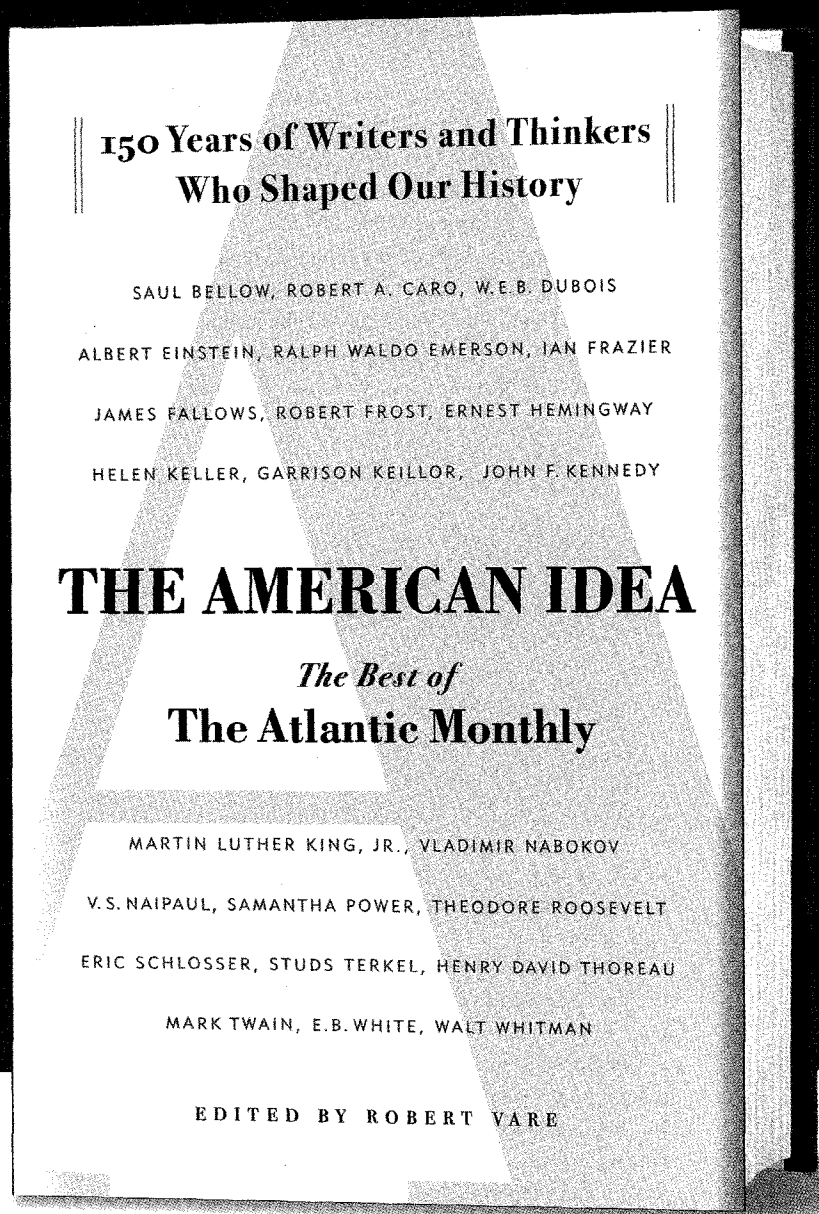
"Trans-national America," July 1916

theologian John Howard Yoder convinced him that "if there is anything to this Christian 'stuff' it must surely involve the conviction that the Son [of God] would rather die on the cross than have the world to be redeemed by violence."

Since then, Hauerwas has been what might be called a Niebuhrian inside-out, laying the problems of American Protestantism at Niebuhr's feet. In his view—set out in his Gifford Lectures, given in 2000 and 2001, 60 years after Niebuhr's—the Christian Church must bring the power of the Gospels to the world rather than seek accommodation with worldly power, and Niebuhr, in an attempt to make faith relevant to the age and acceptable to the cultured despisers of religion, became "the theologian of a domesticated god capable of doing no more than providing comfort to the anxious conscience of the bourgeoisie."

A landmark journey through the American experience

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Where, in such a situation, is the wisdom Niebuhr called for to be found? All the recent ritual invocation of his thought suggests that the place to look is not in his aphorisms and pronouncements, not in the particular petitions he signed or the committees he founded, but in his sense of history and our role in it.

Niebuhr was what Flannery O'Connor called a "realist of distances," and the distance that gave his realism its clarity and explanatory power was gained through a grasp of what was known in his time as sacred history. In his view, the youth and optimism of the American experience was offset by the Founders' conviction that we are a biblical people, enacting in the New World an older history. For Niebuhr, the aspirations that shaped our common life predated the republic: They were the visions of the promised land held by the patriarchs and the apostles, described in the history of Israel's origins and destiny, which, in our early settlers' account, became the story

FROM THE ARCHIVES

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

I have tried to make it clear that it is wrong to use immoral means to attain moral ends. But now I must affirm that it is just as wrong, or even more, to use moral means to preserve immoral ends.

"The Negro is Your Brother," August 1963

of our origins and destiny as well. This history tells of a people confident of its special role yet thwarted again and again on account of its pride, and growing in wisdom through a sense of the frailty of human nature and the limits of earthly powers. This history records that nations rage and peoples rise up together—that war sets brother against brother, despoils the land, and rends the social fabric; it counsels that you go to war with a heavy heart, for the truly good war has never been fought. This history acts as a restraint on national pride, not a stimulant to it, for it is not merely history, but in some sense *our* history, a story that cannot but be a cautionary tale, for it tells us who we are and what we are prone to do.

The war in Iraq, and the debates about the war, suggest that this history is now lost to us. On the surface, our society is thick with religion, but it is religion whose history is merely decorative, like the fiberglass pillars and aluminum gaslights of a McMansion in the suburbs. The Christianity that has a voice in official Washington has as its patriarchs Reagan and Falwell, not Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and yet it has managed to make the nation's longer biblical history repulsive to the liberals who once

acknowledged it as a basic fact of our heritage. Lacking this history, liberals have a mainly ahistorical, secular political culture—one that assumes liberalism began with the New Deal or in 1948 and that would stand apart from religion altogether at a time when an understanding of the religious outlook is crucial to our grasp of the challenges of a globalized world.

In such circumstances, it's no surprise that we fail to hear the voices of prophets like those who, during all the U.S. wars of the past century, called the ruling powers to account. To an astonishing degree, churches have underwritten the war in Iraq, recasting the biblical tradition in accord with the policies of the White House. They've replaced two millennia of thinking about war and peace with grade-school tutorials on Islam and facile comparisons between Iraq and Vietnam, attempting to make a usable past out of events that are hardly even past.

Niebuhr would say that a biblical perspective, once lost, is not easily recovered—cultural regeneration being an abstract enterprise doomed to failure, like most human projects. Yet it's worth recalling his conviction that history isn't a true measure of things, that posterity is only a proximate judgment. "There is no way of transmuting the Christian gospel into a system of historical optimism," he observed. "The final victory over man's disorder is God's and not ours."

Even so, Niebuhr insisted, "we do have a responsibility for proximate victories"—"for the health of our communities, our nations, and our cultures." What might this mean for the war in Iraq? It would mean frankly acknowledging, first of all, that the war as fought—in the misbegotten hope that Iraq, with its fractious history, could be remade in our image—has been lost. And second, that a full American withdrawal from the country is no more possible than a swift and easy victory was. Americans and Iraqis are bound together for the foreseeable future, regardless of the terms on which U.S. forces are drawn down—even if we are driven out of their country by rival factions in a civil war. "To love our enemies cannot mean that we must connive with their injustice," Niebuhr wrote in 1942. "It does mean that beyond all moral distinctions of history we must know ourselves one with our enemies not only in the bonds of common humanity but also in the bonds of common guilt by which that humanity has become corrupted."

As it was in Western Europe, so it is in Iraq. Its history now has an American chapter—and the other way around—and this shared history brings a shared responsibility, whether we like it or not. The recognition of this fact would be not only realistic, but the beginning of wisdom—the first step in the recognition of the limits of our power. ■

Paul Elie, a senior editor with Farrar, Straus and Giroux, is the author of *The Life You Save May Be Your Own: An American Pilgrimage* (2003). His article "The Year of Two Popes" appeared in the January/February 2006 *Atlantic*.

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The decline of spinsters? Smoke-free living? Drawing on a vast new statistical compendium, our commentator unearths, examines, and extrapolates the hidden challenges to America.

BY P. J. O'ROURKE

Graphics by Nigel Holmes

I Sing of Fizzy Fluid Retention

The Millennial Edition of *Historical Statistics of the United States* was published last year—the first significant revision to our national numeric archive since the Bicentennial Edition a generation ago. ¶ Creating this new edition was more than a matter of adding births, personal-computer sales, cable-TV packages, and cell-phone subscribers, while subtracting everything dead or outsourced to China. It seems that fully three-quarters of all facts and figures from America's

federal, state, and local authorities have been generated since 1970. Likewise with about 80 percent of scholarly historical calculations. (The rise of the Internet and the fall in the price of pocket calculators turn out to be pretty damn historic, statistically speaking.)

Indeed, faced with an undertaking so expensive and complex, the United States government itself—an organization notoriously fond of cost and complication—said thanks, but no second helping for us. The project was taken on instead by Cambridge University Press, with the cooperation of the U.S. Census Bureau and scholars from, among other places, the Economic History Association, the Social Science History Association, and the Cliometric

Society. (Clio is the muse of history, and her measurements, I'm led to believe, are va-va-voom stuff when she lets down her hair and takes off those glasses.) Eighty-three professors provided essays, analyses, and critiques. The list of research assistants and supplementary experts goes on for three pages. In case you're still unimpressed by the magnitude of the enterprise, let me put it another way: The Millennial Edition sells for \$1,100.

So this is an important research work. After all, we cannot, as a nation, know where we're going unless we know where we've been, even if I'm not exactly sure what I mean by that statement. Should we barrel down the highway to the future with our eyes glued to the rearview mirror?

Should we keep in mind that if we forget history, we'll end up repeating it, per that famous quote of Santayana's? Yet consider the way history is taught these days: A survey of history students probably would show that they admire Santayana's genius but hope his next CD won't be just a remake of *Supernatural* with different vocalists.

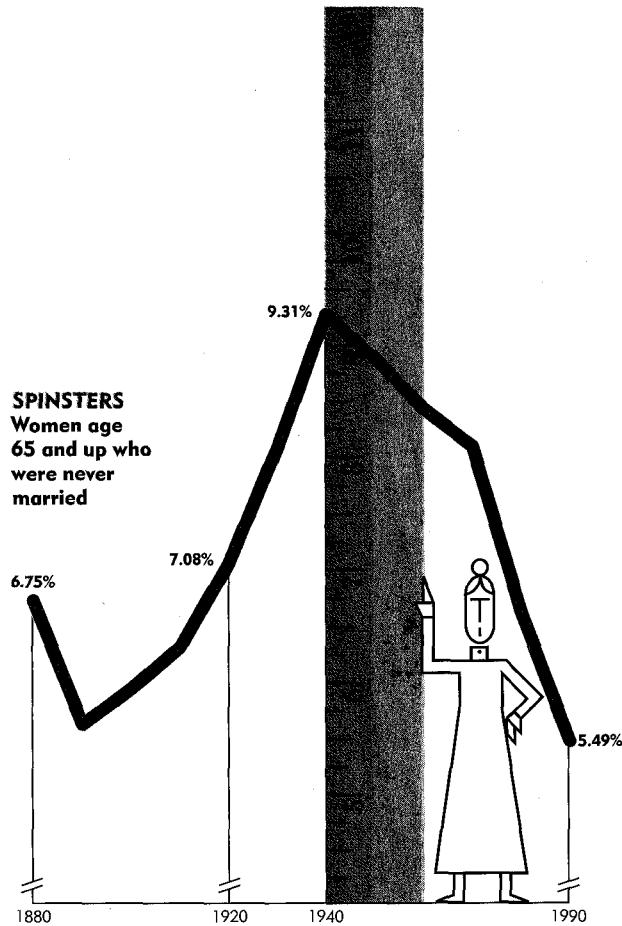
Excuse me if I'm sounding a bit cracked and warped here. The Millennial Edition of *Historical Statistics* arrived at my office a fortnight ago weighing in at 25 pounds in five volumes totaling 5,286 pages and containing 37,339 data series quantifying everything that's got quantity from the earliest Colonial period until the end of the 20th century. Wholesale price of New England codfish in 1634: 10½ shillings the hundredweight. Number of organized bowling teams in 1996: 1,023,785.

This would be enough to bend anyone's mind. And it's bent my mind the way it's bent my IKEA bookshelves. I am a writer. I spend my days kneeling in the muck of language, feeling around for gooey verbs, nouns, and modifiers that I can squash together to make a blob of a sentence that bears some likeness to reason and sense. Imagine my ecstasy when I come across a hard, clean, bright, shiny number. Behold this gem of precision, perfect in its clarity and radiating mathematical reasonableness and arithmetical sensibility in every direction. I am free at last from the slime of words. Are shadows stretching their spectral arms to embrace the decline of day? Do vespers sound their quotidian knell? Does the gloaming echo with prelude to the nightingale's descant? No! The sun sets at 7:56, and shut up.

Historical Statistics is an Aladdin's cave full of such exactitudes. The size of its treasure trove virtually guarantees that it contains an answer—a dazzling, vivid integer of an answer—to every question about America and how it got that way. And I've spent the past two weeks plunging my arms deep into the Millennial Edition, then raising my hands high above my head and letting the diamonds, rubies, and pearls of enumeration dribble between my fingers while I cackle madly with glee.

As I was saying, *Historical Statistics* is a valuable source of primary data concerning a broad range of material and social conditions constituting the American experience. For example, how come our public schools used to be so good, but now they stink? The answer is right here in tables Aa625 and Aa626: spinsters. Once there were women of a certain age with steel in their spine, ice in their gaze, buns in their hair, and remarkable reflexes for smacking knuckles with a ruler. They led three generations of bonehead O'Rourkes through the rowdy wilderness of crowded big-city schools and into at least a shallow pool of learning. Miss Prescott may have been a terror, but I didn't emerge from her American-literature class under the misapprehension that the philosopher, poet, and author of *The Last Puritan*, Santayana, performed at Woodstock.

SPINSTERS Women age 65 and up who were never married



According to nuptiality records, in the last decades of the 19th century the proportion of women 65 and older who had never married was slightly above 6 percent. But by 1920, just in time for my father to go to high school, this number had risen to 7.08 percent. Dad very nearly graduated. In 1930, the spinster percentage was 8.11 percent. Thus my Uncle Mikey-Mike could count to five without removing his mittens. By 1940, the rate was 9.31 percent, and all of my older cousins acquired job skills enough to keep them from going on welfare. (They've been in jail occasionally, yes, but not on welfare.) And I more or less attended college, owing to the fact that by the time I started kindergarten, the spinster rate was still almost 9 percent. Competition at my school was fierce. Only the toughest of the tough could get the prize job of being the old lady who scared the bejesus out of me.

SPOILED KIDS Public elementary and secondary school expenditures per pupil, in constant 1982-1984 dollars



It's all been downhill since then, alas, with spinsterhood plummeting to 5.49 percent by 1990 (when there weren't really any spinsters anymore anyway—just strong women without concern for conformist social pressures, leading their own lives and owning too many cats).

During the golden age of American public schools, teachers also had the advantage of a level of educational funding very different from today's. Table Bc925 shows that, in constant 1982–1984 dollars, annual per-pupil spending in public schools was \$4,090 in 1996 (the last year for which figures are given). By contrast, in 1921, when my father was a high-school freshman, annual per-pupil spending (in the same constant dollars) was \$399. Of course my father got a better education: With \$399, you can't afford to let the kids do anything *but* sit and study. Dad was forbidden to squirm, for fear he'd wear out a precious desk seat.

Americans may have gotten stupider in the late 20th century, but at least they were eating sensibly. We can see Americans becoming more lean and fit in tables Bd568 through Bd580, which detail per capita food consumption from 1970 to 1995. The amount of red meat on the average American's plate declined from 192.4 pounds a year to 166.6. Meanwhile, the intake of healthy and slimming fruits and vegetables rose from 564.4 pounds to 685.9 (if you count both fresh and processed). True, table Bd598 shows that between 1970 and 1994, Americans, on average, increased their daily intake of kilocalories from 3,300 to 3,800. But kilocalories are those European-style, metric-system calories that keep the French so thin.

The real reason Americans grew to the size of mastodons between the willowy days of Pat Nixon and the XXXL-thong Lewinsky years is to be found in tables Bd584 and Bd585. Annual consumption of bottled water and carbonated beverages went from 32 gallons per person in 1976 to 62.8 gallons in 1995. We're not fat. But we are about to burst due to fluid retention. And since 51.2 of those 62.8 gallons of liquid are the fizzy stuff, it's very

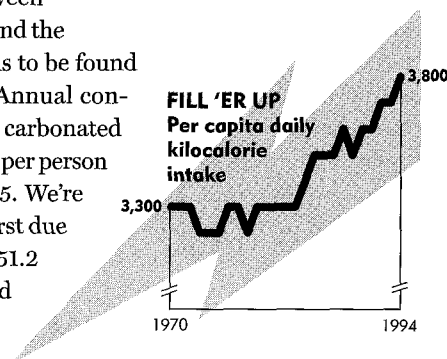
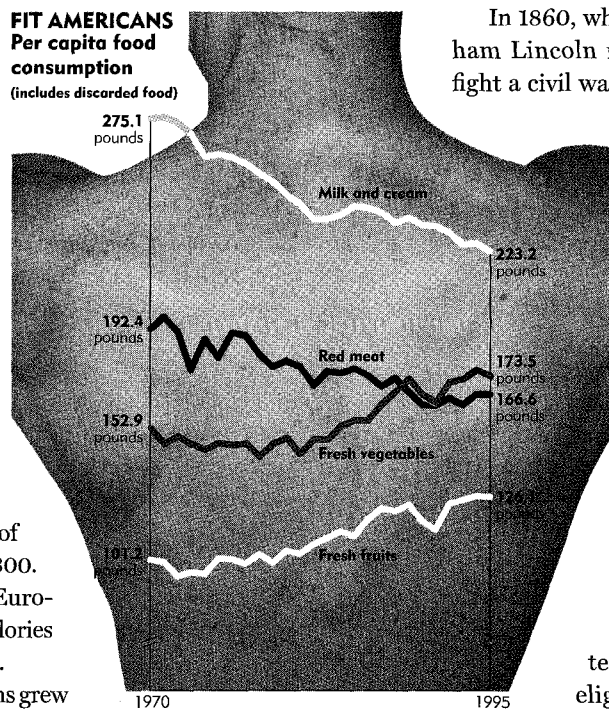
important never to shake or drop an American or poke one with a sharp object. The result would be a mess worse than Watergate and the Clinton impeachment put together.

Speaking of which, do you know what causes low voter turnout in America? It's the result of having the fate of our nation at stake. This began with the bitter presidential election of 1828, which pitted the education, cultivation, and puritan constraint of John Quincy Adams against the yahoo populism of Andrew Jackson, thereby deciding permanently whether America would become a shining city upon a hill or an overlighted strip mall along a highway. Voter turnout that year was 55.2 percent. A dozen years later, a small and unctuous incumbent, Martin Van Buren, the first professional politician to occupy the White House, ran against the vacuous William Henry Harrison, who would die from the pneumonia he contracted by giving an overlong inauguration speech in the freezing rain. Harrison's platform consisted entirely of the slogan "Tippecanoe and Tyler Too." Van Buren's platform was even less substantive. There were no issues of note. And voter turnout was 77.5 percent.

In 1860, when a vote for or against Abraham Lincoln meant deciding whether to fight a civil war, 72.1 percent of eligible voters went to the polls. In 1876, when a vote for or against Rutherford B. Hayes meant *bubkes*, 82.9 percent of eligible voters showed up.

In 1932, with Republicans and Democrats offering radically different political and economic responses to the Great Depression, voter turnout was 56.8 percent. In 1940, with the reelection of FDR a foregone conclusion, turnout was 62.9 percent.

Another way to guarantee that a lower percentage of eligible voters will exercise the right to their franchise is to guarantee their franchise rights. Voter turnout in the presidential election of 1916 was 61.9 percent. Then, in 1920, the 19th Amendment was ratified, giving the vote to women. Voter turnout in that year's presidential election was 49.2 percent. The Voting Rights Act, ensuring access to the polls for blacks, was passed in 1965. Voter turnout went from 63.3 percent in 1964 to 62.5 percent in 1968.



BOSE

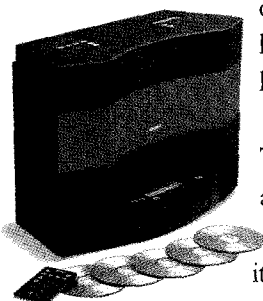
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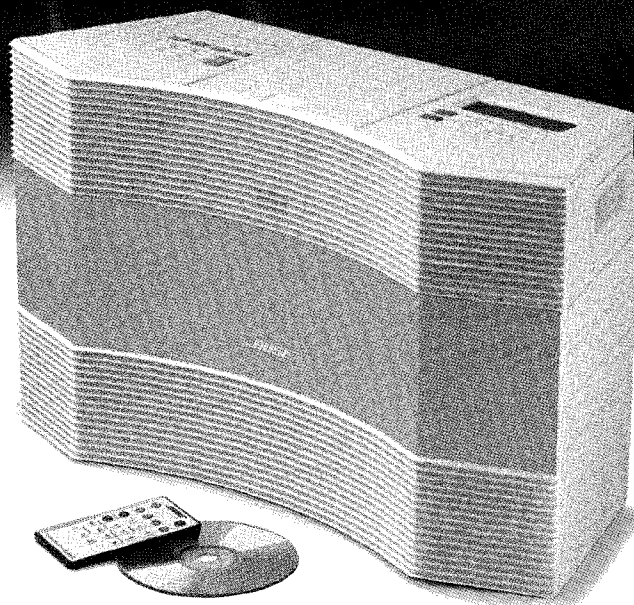
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And after the voting age was lowered to 18, in 1971, voter turnout took a further dip, to 56.4 percent in the 1972 presidential election.

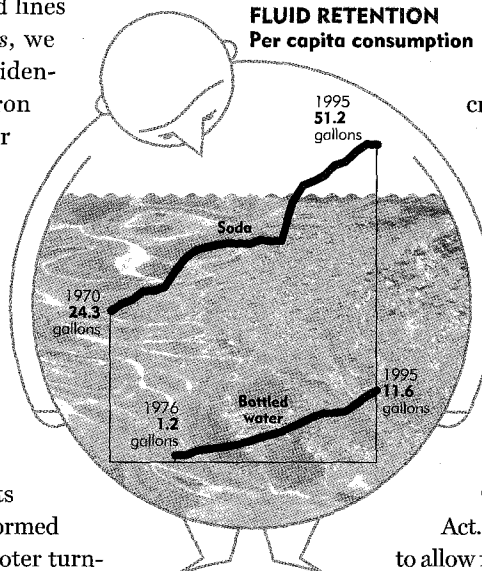
Extrapolating from the trend lines evident in *Historical Statistics*, we see that if one of the 2008 presidential candidates is a vicious moron (entirely possible) and the other is a beneficent genius (not as likely), and all life on Earth is threatened because al-Qaeda has discovered a way to poke every American with a sharp object simultaneously (could happen), and we extend the franchise to absolutely everyone, including preschoolers, citizens of the EU, illegal aliens, space aliens, and household pets (probably resulting in a better-informed electorate), we could achieve a voter turnout of zero.

That's just the pleasant daydream of a tired, cynical writer in dread of looming deadlines for tired, cynical commentary on the 2008 presidential hopefuls. A William Henry Harrison of an inauguration to the lot of them.

But never mind—*Historical Statistics* displays plenty of other cheerful trends. We all became fabulously wealthy last century, so much so that the 1999 U.S. Census Bureau's poverty threshold for a family of four (\$10,221.49 in constant 1982–1984 dollars) was almost exactly equal to the compensation for a full-time worker back in 1941 (\$10,360.54 in the same constant dollars). We got so rich

that regular folks with ordinary jobs were somehow transformed into victims of soul-crushing poverty, the objects—at best—of our charitable contempt.

FLUID RETENTION Per capita consumption



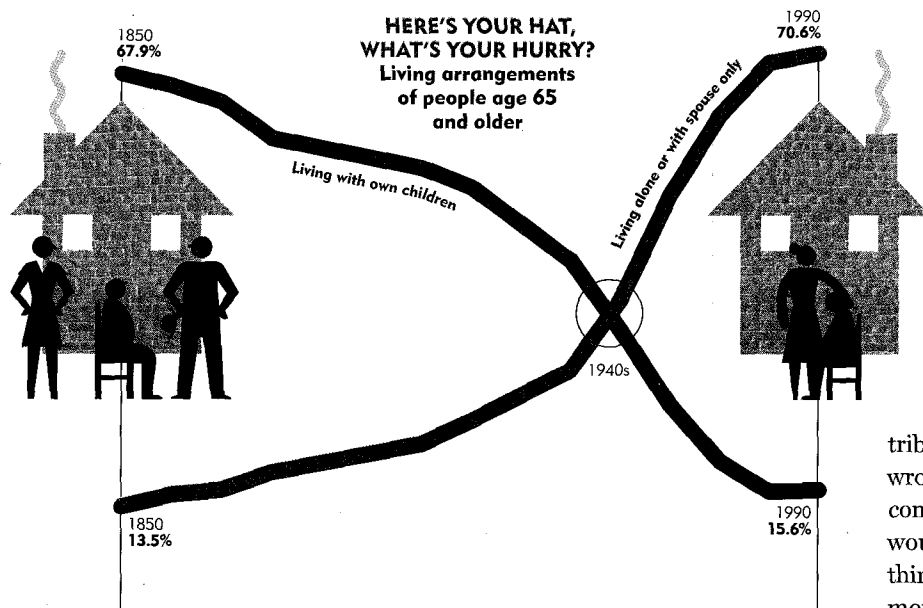
Then there's the "Here's your hat, what's your hurry?" graph, figure Ae-B, showing how we got our crabby old parents out of our homes and into the Heaven's Gate Elder-Care Facility. The vertical axis of the graph measures the percentage of codgers and crones. The horizontal axis is a time line from 1850 to 1990. On the graph is a line labeled "Living with own children" and a line labeled "Living alone or with spouse only." Move your finger along the time line to 1935, when Congress passed the Social Security Act. Then move it a little more to the right to allow for the benefits to kick in and the war-time housing shortage to abate. Now move it halfway up the graph—X marks the spot! You've

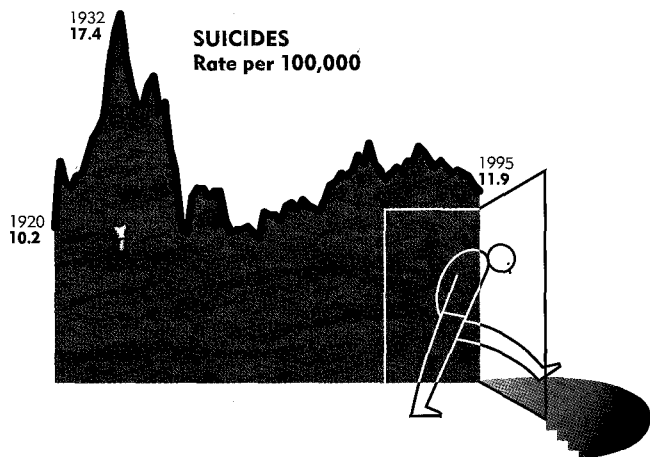
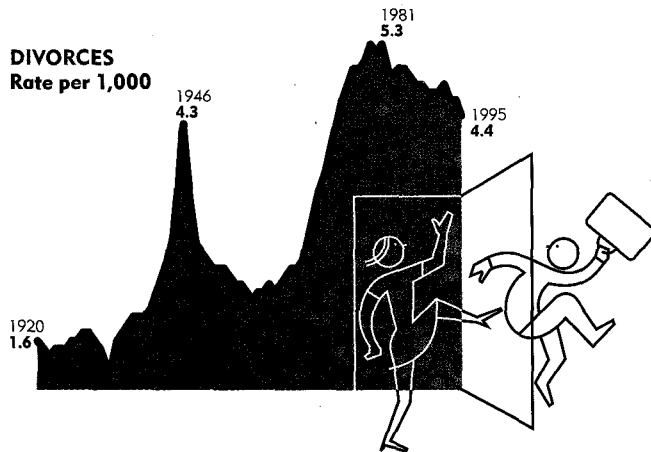
put your finger on a total sociological inversion. The living-alone line soars—a rocket probe into the deep space of solitary senility. The living-with-children line drops like a George W. Bush approval poll. In 1850, about 13 percent of people over 65 were living alone or with just their spouse, and about 70 percent were living with their children. By 1990, the percentages were reversed almost exactly.

What sighs of relief must have been expelled along with the seniors as spare rooms were aired, ancient toy poodles were euthanized, radios and TVs were tuned to bearable programming at endurable volumes, and the

last vestiges of clan and tribal obligation were dumped in the trash, along with the renewal notice for the large-print edition of *Reader's Digest*.

Throwing the old folks out of the house seems to have made us so happy that pretty soon, in pursuit of further happiness, we began throwing each other out of the house as well. Divorce rates doubled between the early 1960s and the middle 1990s. And one of the demographers who contributed an essay to *Historical Statistics* wrote that about half of all the marriages contracted at the end of the 20th century would end in divorce, and that about a third of the babies being born had unwed mothers. Putting all that together with

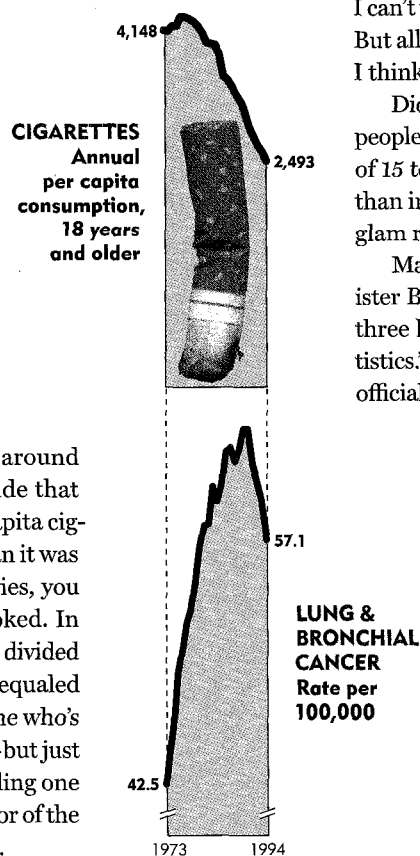




a continuing decline in the fertility rate among native-born women, we can conclude that the final years of the last century were marked by a trend toward smaller and smaller—and, therefore, happier and happier—households. However, the suicide rate held steady, and even dropped a bit at the end of the 1990s, so Americans did not take the final step in making their households as absolutely small and perfectly happy as possible. But, as with the Social Security Act, the right government program may be able to remedy this.

On another upbeat note, as a longtime smoker, I'm glad to say that *Historical Statistics* allows me to conclude that stopping smoking causes lung cancer. Practically all Americans claim to have stopped smoking back in the 1970s, as they inevitably tell you every time they bum a cigarette. And per capita cigarette consumption did drop steadily from 1973 to 1994. But during the same period, the incidence of lung and bronchial cancer rose from 42.5 per 100,000 people to 57.1 per 100,000.

Doing a little additional fooling around with the numbers, I can also conclude that nobody stopped smoking at all. Per capita cigarette smoking was higher in 1994 than it was in 1941, and if you watch 1940s movies, you know that back then everybody smoked. In 1994, the number of cigarettes smoked divided by the number of Americans over 18 equaled about 123 packs a year. So if it's only me who's still smoking, plus you every so often—but just socially—then the two of us are spending one hell of a lot of time outside the back door of the office building in all kinds of weather.



There's really no end to the things that one can conclude from these five volumes. Had I but world enough and time—and if the dog hadn't chewed my cheap, flimsy pocket calculator—I could prove, disprove, re-prove, and improve more things about America than America has things. And America has a lot of things. Of course it probably helps that my education in mathematics ended with a Little Bighorn experience involving Chief Soh Cah Toa in sophomore trig. And I've never taken a statistics course. I don't know a standard deviation from a deviation that would condemn me to eternal perdition, and I can't tell a bell curve from Ms. Clio's bustline. But all this is equally true of most readers. So I think I could pull it off.

Did you know that the percentage of young people in the crucial "youthquake" age bracket of 15 to 24 was higher in 1973 (18.5 percent) than in 1967 (16.7 percent)? Therefore it was glam rock that ended the war in Vietnam.

Mark Twain quoted the British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli as saying, "There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies and statistics." That in itself was either a collation of official data or a fib, since there's no record of Disraeli saying any such thing. This goes to show we should take Twain's statement in the spirit in which it was made. Who more than Samuel Clemens was fond of a very, very tall tale? Imagine how the Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County would have performed if he'd been filled with the contents of the Millennium Edition of *Historical Statistics of the United States*. ▀

P. J. O'Rourke is a correspondent for *The Atlantic*. His most recent book is *On the Wealth of Nations* (2007).

Hulls in the water could soon displace *boots on the ground* as the most important military catchphrase of our time. But our Navy is stretched thin. How we manage dwindling naval resources will go a long way toward determining our future standing in the world.

BY ROBERT D. KAPLAN

America's Elegant Decline

Beware pendulum swings. Before 9/11, not enough U.S. generals believed that the future of war was unconventional and tied to global anarchy. They insisted on having divisions to fight against, not ragtag groups of religious warriors who, as it turned out, fought better than state armies in the Muslim world ever did. Now the Pentagon is consumed by a focus on urban warfare and counterinsurgency; inside military circles, the development of culturally adroit foreign-area officers (FAOs) and the learning of exotic languages have become the rage. My own »



warnings about anarchy (“The Coming Anarchy,” February 1994 *Atlantic*) and my concentration on FAOs and Army Special Forces in recent books may have helped this trend. But have we pushed it too far? We may finally master the art of counterinsurgency just in time for it to recede in importance.

History suggests that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan will be imperfect guideposts to conflicts ahead. The quaint Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1871 gave no intimation of World War I. Neither World War II nor Korea prepared us for Vietnam, which was more similar to the Philippine War of 1899–1902 than to its immediate predecessors. The ease of the Gulf War provided no hint of what an ordeal the Iraq War would be. Today, while we remain fixated on street fighting in Baghdad, the militaries of China, India, South Korea, and Japan are modernizing, and Russia has maintained and subsidized its military research-and-development base by selling weapons to China and others. Though counterinsurgency will remain a core part of our military doctrine, the Pentagon does not have the luxury of planning for one military future; it must plan for several.

“Regular wars” between major states could be as frequent in the 21st century as they were in the 20th. In his 2005 book, *Another Bloody Century*, the British scholar Colin Gray, a professor of international politics and strategic studies at the University of Reading, explains convincingly that these future wars will not require any “manifestation of insanity by political leaders,” nor even an “aberration from normal statecraft,” but may come

about merely because of what Thucydides recognized as “fear, honour, and interest.” Wars between the United States and a Sino-Russian axis or between the United States and a coalition of rogue states are just two of the scenarios Gray imagines.

Are we prepared to fight these wars? Our Army and Marine Corps together constitute the most battle-hardened regular land force in the world. But it has been a long time since our Navy has truly fought another navy, or our Air Force another air force. In the future they could be tested to the same extent that the Army and Marine Corps have been. The current catchphrase is *boots on the ground*; in the future it could be *hulls in the water*.

Democracy and supremacy undermine the tragic sense required for long-range planning. A “peaceful, gain-loving nation” like the United States “is not far-sighted, and far-sightedness is needed for adequate military preparation, especially in these days,” warned Navy Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan in 1890, a time when—although the Panama Canal was soon to be built and World War I lay just over the horizon—America was still preoccupied with land-based westward expansion (Wounded Knee, the last battle of the Indian Wars, was fought that year). Mahan notwithstanding, too few strategists at the time were thinking seriously about sea power. Today we are similarly obsessed with dirty land wars, and our 300-ship Navy is roughly half the size it was in the mid-1980s.

A great navy is like oxygen: You notice it only when it is gone. But the strength of a nation’s sea presence, more than

any other indicator, has throughout history often been the best barometer of that nation's power and prospects. "Those far-distant storm-beaten ships upon which [Napoleon's] Grand Army never looked, stood between it and the dominion of the world," Mahan wrote, describing how the British Royal Navy had checked Napoleon's ambitions. In our day, carrier strike groups, floating in international waters only a few miles off enemy territory, require no visas or exit strategies. Despite the quagmire of Iraq, we remain the greatest outside power in the Middle East because of our ability to project destructive fire from warships in the Indian Ocean and its tributary waters such as the Persian Gulf. Our sea power allows us to lose a limited war on land without catastrophic consequences. The Navy, together with the Air Force, constitutes our insurance policy. The Navy also plays a crucial role as the bus driver for most of the Army's equipment, whenever the Army deploys overseas.

Army units can't forward-deploy anywhere in significant numbers without a national debate. Not so the Navy. Forget the cliché about the essence of the Navy being tradition; I've spent enough time with junior officers and enlisted sailors on Pacific deployments to know that the essence of our Navy is *operations*: disaster relief, tracking Chinese subs,

one of the world's busiest waterways, the Strait of Malacca. In an age when 90 percent of global commerce travels by sea, and 95 percent of our imports and exports from outside North America do the same (even as that trade volume is set to double by 2020), and when 75 percent of the world's population is clustered within 200 miles of the sea, the relative decline of our Navy is a big, dangerous fact to which our elites appear blind.

THE END OF THE MAHANIAN CENTURY?

The best way to understand the tenuousness of our grip on "hard," military power (to say nothing of "soft," diplomatic power) is to understand our situation at sea. This requires an acquaintance with two books published a century ago: Mahan's *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783*, which was written in 1890, and Julian S. Corbett's *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*, which came out in 1911.

Few books have had more influence on military policy than Mahan's. It affected the thinking of Presidents William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt—as well as that of Germany's Kaiser Wilhelm II—and it helped prompt the naval buildup before World War I. Mahan showed

The strength of a nation's navy has throughout history been one of the best barometers for gauging that nation's power and prospects.
Our Navy is now half the size it was in the 1980s.

guarding sea-lanes, and so forth. American sailors don't care what the mission is, as long as there is one, and the farther forward the better. The seminal event for the U.S. Navy was John Paul Jones's interdiction of the British during the Revolutionary War—which occurred off Yorkshire, on the other side of the Atlantic. During the quasi-war that President John Adams waged against France from 1798 to 1800, U.S. warships protected American merchant vessels off what is today Indonesia. American warships operated off North Africa in the First Barbary War of 1801 to 1805. The War of 1812 found the Navy as far down the globe as the coast of Brazil and as far up as the North Cape of Scandinavia. Peter Swartz, an expert at the Center for Naval Analyses, observes that because operating thousands of miles from home ports is so ingrained in U.S. naval tradition, no one thinks it odd that even the Coast Guard has ships in service from Greenland to South America.

Great navies help preserve international stability. When the British navy began to decline, the vacuum it left behind helped engender the competition among major powers that led to World War I. After the U.S. Navy was forced to depart Subic Bay in the Philippines in 1992, piracy quintupled in the Southeast Asian archipelago—which includes

that because the sea is the great "commons" of civilization, naval power—to protect merchant fleets—had always been the determining factor in European political struggles. The strength of his argument lay less in its originality than in its comprehensiveness, achieved by numerous examples. He pointed out that there were no great sea battles in the Second Punic War, because Rome's mastery of the Mediterranean was a deciding factor in Carthage's defeat. He noted that George Washington partly attributed America's victory in its war for independence to France's control of the seas—even as several decades earlier France had lost the Seven Years' War partly because of its neglect of sea power.

Mahan believed in concentrating national naval forces in search of the decisive battle: For him, success was about sinking the other fleet. Mahan's aggressive sensibility perfectly matched the temperament of Theodore Roosevelt. As a result, it was in the quiet years before World War I that America became a great sea power—and consequently a Great Power.

Julian Corbett, a British historian, did not so much disagree with Mahan as offer a subtler approach, placing greater emphasis on doing more with less. Corbett

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asserted that just because one nation has lost control of the sea, another nation has not necessarily gained it. A naval coalition that may appear weak and dispersed can, if properly constituted, have "a reality of strength." He called this a "fleet in being"—a collection of ships that can quickly coalesce into a unified fleet when necessary. This fleet-in-being wouldn't need to dominate or sink other fleets; it could be effective by seizing bases and policing

FROM THE ARCHIVES

THEODORE ROOSEVELT

Captain [Alfred Thayer] Mahan has written distinctively the best and most important, and also by far the most interesting, book on naval history which has been produced on either side of the water for many a long year . . .

Captain Mahan's effort is to show the tremendous effect which sea power has had upon the development of certain of the great nations of the world, especially at momentous crises of their history . . . He never for a moment loses sight of the relations which the struggles by sea bore to the history of the time; and, for the period which he covers, he shows, as no other writer has done, the exact points and the wonderful extent of the influence of the sea power of the various contending nations upon their ultimate triumph or failure, and upon the features of the mighty races to which they belonged . . .

We need a large navy, composed not merely of cruisers, but containing also a full proportion of powerful battle-ships, able to meet those of any other nation. It is not economy—it is niggardly and foolish short-sightedness—to cramp our naval expenditures, while squandering money right and left on everything else, from pensions to public buildings.

"The Influence of Sea Power upon History," October 1890

choke points. Such a deceptively able fleet, Corbett argued, should pursue an "active and vigorous life" in the conduct of limited defense, by, for example, carrying out harassing operations. As it happened, Corbett's book came out after the British Royal Navy had reduced its worldwide presence by leveraging the growing sea power of its allies Japan and the United States.

A hundred years later, the Mahanian Century has ended. The period of 1890 to 1989 was about dominance: controlling vast oceanic spaces by making sure your national navy had more ships than those of your competitors. This era reached its zenith in 1945, when

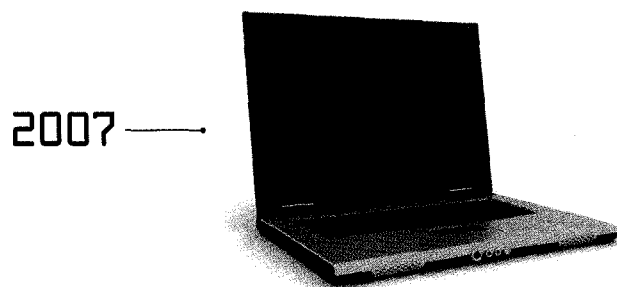
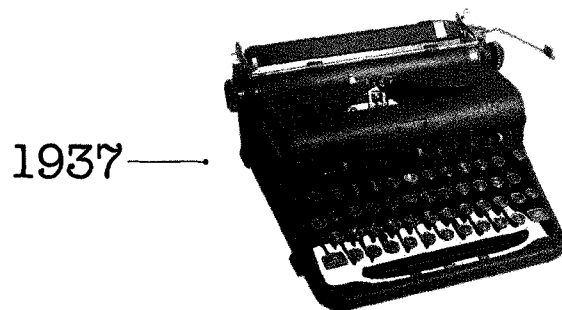
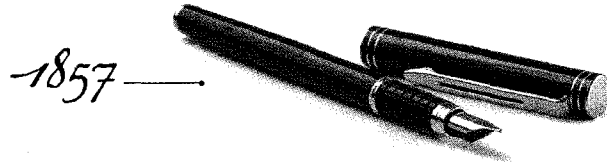
the U.S. Navy and its vast fleet of supply ships numbered 6,700. With no peer competitor in sight, the president and Congress moved quickly to cut that Navy, along with the standing Army, considerably. By 1950, the United States had only 634 ships. The drawdown helped set the stage for the "Revolt of the Admirals," when a group of officers warned the nation of calamities ahead. (Indeed, two decades later the Soviet navy would be a near-peer competitor.) But in a 1954 article in *Proceedings*, the journal of the U.S. Naval Institute in Annapolis, a young Harvard academic named Samuel P. Huntington told the Navy not to feel sorry for itself:

The resources which a service is able to obtain in a democratic society are a function of the *public support* of that service. The service has the responsibility to develop this necessary support, and it can only do this if it possesses a strategic concept which clearly formulates its relationship to the national security.

Huntington recommended that the Navy emphasize its ability to support ground troops *from the sea*: Any battles with the Soviet Union were likely to be on land, so the Navy needed to play up the job it could do in a war with a great land power. The Navy took Huntington's advice, and it worked: For the remainder of the Cold War, the Navy was able to hold the line at roughly 600 ships, in part by arguing for its importance in supporting a ground war against the Soviet Union and its allies—it would be the Navy's job to get soldiers to the fight, and to soften up the battlefield with offshore firepower.

In 1991, the Gulf War provided a live-action demonstration of this capacity. Even so, by 1997, post-Cold War budget cuts had reduced the Navy to 365 ships. (In the Quadrennial Defense Review of that year, the Pentagon established a "red line" of 300 ships, below which the Navy would not go.) Of course the 300-ship Navy could still, in the words of Robert O. Work, vice president for strategic studies at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessment, in Washington, "pound the snot" out of primitive challengers like Iraq, Iran, and North Korea, because the precision revolution in weaponry enabled, for instance, a single wire-guided missile from a U.S. destroyer to accomplish what in Vietnam had required wave after wave of carrier-based planes.

Still, the fewer vessels you have, the riskier each deployment, because a ship can't be in two places at once. Due to the rapid increase in ship-borne trade, globalization favors large navies that protect trade and tanker routes. Additionally, while the United States remains a great naval power, it is no longer a maritime power; that is, we don't have much of a merchant fleet left to support our warships in an emergency. We've been priced out of the shipbuilding market by cheap-labor countries in Asia.



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All of this puts us in a precarious position. History shows that powerful competitor navies can easily emerge out of nowhere in just a few decades. The vast majority of American ships that saw combat in World War II had not even been planned before the spring of 1941. The Indian navy, which may soon be the third-largest in the world, was not on many people's radar screens at the

FROM THE ARCHIVES

HENRY DAVID THOREAU

An English traveller ... tells us that "... The heavens of America appear infinitely higher, the sky is bluer, the air is fresher, the cold is intenser, the moon looks larger, the stars are brighter, the thunder is louder, the lightning is vividder, the wind is stronger, the rain is heavier, the mountains are higher, the rivers longer, the forests bigger, the plains broader."...

If the moon looks larger here than in Europe, probably the sun looks larger also. If the heavens of America appear infinitely higher, and the stars brighter, I trust that these facts are symbolical of the height to which the philosophy and poetry and religion of her inhabitants may one day soar ... For I believe that climate does thus react on man—as there is something in the mountain-air that feeds the spirit and inspires. Will not man grow to greater perfection intellectually as well as physically under these influences? ... I trust that we shall be more imaginative, that our thoughts will be clearer, fresher, and more ethereal, as our sky—our understanding more comprehensive and broader, like our plains—our intellect generally on a grander scale, like our thunder and lightning, our rivers and mountains and forests—and our hearts shall even correspond in breadth and depth and grandeur to our inland seas. Perchance there will appear to the traveller something, he knows not what, of *leta* and *glabra*, of joyous and serene, in our very faces. Else to what end does the world go on, and why was America discovered? ...

In Wildness is the preservation of the world.

"Walking," June 1862

close of the Cold War. Nor, for that matter, was the now-expanding Chinese submarine fleet. Robert Work told me that he believes the eventual incorporation of Taiwan into China will have the effect that the Battle of Wounded Knee had on the United States: It will psychologically close an era of national consolidation for the Chinese, thereby dramatically redirecting their military energies

outward, beyond their coastal waters. Tellingly, whereas the U.S. Navy pays homage to Mahan by naming buildings after him, the Chinese avidly read him; the Chinese are the Mahanians now.

Then there is the Japanese navy, which now operates 117 warships, including 16 submarines. In a sense, we're back to 1890, when a spark of naval competition among rising powers like Japan, Germany, and the United States left Britain unable to maintain its relative advantage.

THE 1,000-SHIP NAVY

By necessity, the American Navy is turning from Mahan to Corbett. "Where the old 'Maritime Strategy' focused on sea control," Admiral Michael Mullen, the chief of naval operations (recently promoted to chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff), said last year, "the new one must recognize that the economic tide of all nations rises not when the seas are controlled by one [nation], but rather when they are made safe and free for all."

He went on: "I'm after that proverbial 1,000-ship Navy—a fleet-in-being, if you will, comprised of all freedom-loving nations, standing watch over the seas, standing watch over each other." Subtract the platitudes, and it's clear that Admiral Mullen is squaring a number of circles to contend with the difficult reality he's up against.

A grand maritime coalition that policed the seas and provided disaster relief would allow for such possibilities as joint American-Chinese antipiracy patrols in MALSINDO (the Malaysia-Singapore-Indonesia archipelagic region, as an American Navy acronym labels it). In fact, national navies tend to cooperate better than national armies, partly because sailors are united by a kind of fellowship-of-the-sea born of their shared experience facing violent natural forces. Such coalitions would likely get along better than the land-based ones we have seen in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Kosovo. Requirements for membership would be minimal: Any navy could join, provided it were willing to share information. Leading a cooperative international enterprise like this to interdict terrorists, pirates, and smugglers in coastal waters and to deter rogue states would help the United States improve its deteriorating reputation in the wake of Iraq.

Mullen's emphasis on a coalition of freedom-loving nations is itself an indication of diminished resources. During the Cold War, we had crucial naval allies whose bases could always be depended upon—Japan, Great Britain, Denmark, Norway, Iceland, and several others. With their help, we held the Soviet navy in check under the polar ice. But given current public opinion in Europe, perhaps the only one of these allies we can rely on in the future is Japan, which—as an island civilization still hated throughout Asia and beset with security dilemmas of limited interest to Europeans—may be the loneliest country in the world except for Israel. (Experts I spoke to for this

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article worried about the prospective loss of allied basing and advocated sea basing. One of the Navy's earliest proposed designs was a device resembling a self-powered oil rig with massive platforms for UAVs—unmanned aerial vehicles—and other air assets.)

With no core group of allies, commerce has to be protected by all, for all. That's no easy challenge. Whereas airplanes are monitored and regulated from takeoff to landing, merchant ships are on their own in the anarchic seas. But in a post-9/11 world, with the possibility

capability also enables us to "take out selected individuals and insert small groups of special forces," Weeks says, adding that leveraging other powers by operating as part of an international 1,000-ship navy would certainly help with all this.

A multinational fleet-in-being would also lead to greater intelligence sharing and allow us greater forward presence, closer to enemy shores. This would make it easier to identify key targets. In fact, the 1,000-ship multinational navy is essentially the seagoing equivalent of counterinsurgency.

But while the 1,000-ship navy would help cut down on smuggling and piracy, and possibly terrorism, it doesn't really deal with the basic strategic function of the U.S. Navy: the need to offer a serious, inviolable instrument for inflicting great punishment—a stare-down capability. Nor does it address the need to quickly transport troops and equipment to distant conflicts.

"The Navy is not primarily about low-level raiding, piracy patrols, and riverine warfare," Jim Thomas, a former deputy assistant secretary of defense, told me. "If we delude ourselves into thinking that it is, we're finished as a great power." Piracy, for example, has been a scourge for hundreds of years in some of the very same places we say it cannot be tolerated, like off the Horn of Africa or in archipelagic Southeast Asia. As the late Vice Admiral and Navy futurist Arthur Cebrowski once told me, with a dismissive wave of his arm, "Piracy is just part of the noise." No matter how the Pentagon spins it, the reality is that development of a 1,000-ship international navy is not a way of maintaining our current strength; rather, it's a way of elegantly managing American decline.

But let's remember that while the relative decline of the British Royal Navy helped produce World War I, Britain and its allies still won that war, thanks in some measure to sea power—and that Britain would go on to triumph in an even greater world war two decades later. Our own growing relative weakness need not mean that our adversaries gain advantage. Decline can be overrated.

THE WEARY TITAN

As noted, today we have only half the nearly 600 ships that the U.S. Navy had in the 1980s, when it was directed by Secretary of the Navy John Lehman; he observes that now, because we are building only five ships per year, "we're on the way to a 150-ship Navy."

This attrition is partly a result of the high cost of the war in Iraq and the shrinkage of discretionary funds in the national budget, but it's also a function of the procurement process itself. The building of naval platforms offers a case study in how a vast and aged bureaucratic system is subject to disease and calcification—which are in part what doomed Pharaonic Egypt, Mayan Central America, and Soviet Russia.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

So through the night rode Paul Revere;
And so through the night went his cry of alarm
To every Middlesex village and farm,—
A cry of defiance, and not of fear,—
A voice in the darkness, a knock at the door,
And a word that shall echo forevermore!
For, borne on the night-wind of the Past,
Through all our history, to the last,
In the hour of darkness and peril and need,
The people will waken and listen to hear
The hurrying hoof-beat of that steed,
And the midnight-message of Paul Revere.

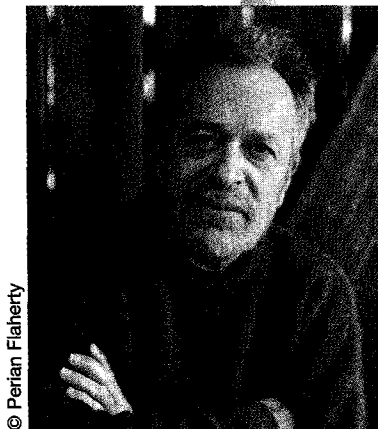
"Paul Revere's Ride," January 1861

of nuclear terrorism abetted by ocean-based piracy and smuggling, the anarchy needs to be quelled, and the seas and the ports policed. Hence the benefits of a multinational piracy patrol.

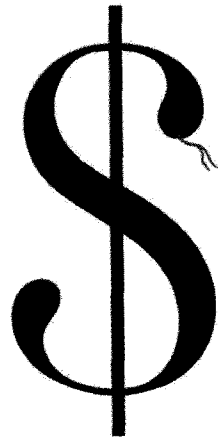
Stanley Weeks is a Washington-based naval and defense-policy analyst for a Fortune 500 commercial consulting company. Over the course of his career, he has done everything from mentoring the new Albanian navy to advising U.S. combatant commanders about how to defend against missiles. When I spoke to him in his office in McLean, Virginia, he told me about other possibilities for Admiral Mullen's 1,000-ship fleet-in-being. "Boots-on-the-ground in most cases is a loser," Weeks said. "On land, we're not playing to our advantage, because there is an endless demographic supply of young male religious fanatics." He emphasized that naval operations can lower America's profile, since they attract less attention than Army operations, making our military less vulnerable to media attacks—and therefore also making it easier to carry out operations that might otherwise become lightning rods for criticism. Offshore maritime

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rate social responsibility movement distracting and even counterproductive...He urges us to rebalance the roles of business and government... 'to separate capitalism from democracy and guard the border between them.'"

—PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

To get this bureaucracy to agree on a new class of ship can take years—even decades—of studies and committee meetings, in which slowing down the process is easy and taking even the smallest risk is hard. Consequently, by the time a ship is launched, it is already dated. Yet because the ship must be equipped with every weapons system conceivable, the cost remains high. (To leave any weapon system out is to make the ship, to some degree, more vulnerable—and that means risk.) The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer on which I was embedded in 2005 cost nearly \$1 billion. The new DDG-1000 Zumwalt-class destroyer, envisioned in one form or another for 12 years and beset with delays, could end up costing \$3 billion a ship—if any get built. The new Gerald R. Ford-class aircraft carriers could cost a whopping \$8 billion each—not including \$6 billion of research-and-development costs.

History can be cruel to such a geologic pace; this slowness is a recipe for vulnerability and nasty strategic surprise. We have a capital-intensive Navy consisting of vessels that cost tens of billions of dollars, and that must therefore each deploy for decades if they are to return the investment. Yet all a future peer competitor like China need do to greatly devalue our fleet is to improve its ballistic-missile technology to the point where we're forced to move our carriers, say, 100 miles east of their present positions

consider the financial burden of sustaining this Navy. Admiral Mullen was “hanging on by his fingernails” trying to keep current projects going, according to one expert. “It would take a Chinese-perpetrated 9/11 to give us the budget we need,” the same expert told me, “and the Chinese would never be that stupid. They will bleed us slowly, by just doing what they're doing.” On October 26, 2006, a Chinese Song-class attack submarine, equipped with Russian-made wake-homing torpedoes, reportedly stalked the USS *Kitty Hawk* Carrier Strike Group in the Pacific. The sub boldly surfaced within firing range before being detected only five miles from the carrier itself.

That incident might prove to be a better harbinger of the future than anything going on in Iraq. A second incident, this past January, provided another augury. When the Chinese destroyed an aging weather satellite with a missile-launched interceptor, “they ended two decades of restraint over the militarization of space,” as Vice Admiral John G. Morgan Jr., deputy chief of naval operations for information, plans, and strategy, told me. According to Stratfor, a consulting company that analyzes intelligence, the Chinese are developing a space-warfare capability that could allow them to limit U.S. naval power without a massive naval buildup of their own, by threatening our satellite-based intelligence-gathering and weapons systems.

Pentagon spin aside, developing a 1,000-ship international navy is not a way of maintaining our strength; it's a way of managing American decline. Fortunately, decline can be overrated.

off the Asian mainland, to keep them out of missile range. Worse, a nuclear-radiation device arriving in a container in the harbor at, say, Norfolk, Virginia, could render these multibillion-dollar platforms suddenly unusable.

The coming technological era of precision and stealth will not be friendly to gargantuan objects like carriers. Consider the “supercavitation” torpedo, a torpedo that launches from a small boat and, by its ability to create a cushion of air between it and the surrounding water, can travel at 200 knots (regular torpedoes can travel at only 35 knots) and immobilize a carrier on detonation.

Fortunately, our defense bureaucracy is slowly rising to the challenge—not by eliminating such threats but by diminishing them. For instance, the new Ford-class carriers will be built with laser guns to kill incoming missiles, anti-torpedo torpedoes to deal with supercavitation technology, and electric catapults for launching UAVs in case fighter jets, with their human pilots, give way to enhanced remote-controlled Predators that can be refueled in the air.

Decline can be imperceptible. But if you think that what I have been describing does not constitute decline,

The danger isn't China per se. China's actions are merely a premonition of a future that will favor nations with dynamic start-up defense bureaucracies less careful and doubt-ridden than our own, unburdened by layers of committees and commissions, and willing to buy—or steal—cutting-edge technology.

To grasp what our military is up against, think of our defense bureaucracy as a great metropolitan newspaper, proud of its editorial oversight, accuracy, and formal English usage, yet besieged and occasionally humiliated by bloggers, whose usage is sloppy and whose fact-checking is weak, sometimes nonexistent. The paper soldiers on, winning awards and affecting the national debate, even as each half decade its opinion carries less weight. Now think of an \$8 billion Ford-class carrier surprised by dozens of jet-skis ridden by Iranians armed with shoulder-fired missiles—a scenario one expert described to me. Such an attack wouldn't destroy the carrier, but it might kill sailors and damage some of the radar and planes on deck, worth millions of dollars. Imagine the headlines. Riding through the Strait of Malacca with a carrier strike group

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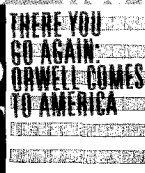
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not long ago, I saw how easy it is for small fishing boats to draw suddenly alongside.

Another likely future scenario our Navy may have to confront, described to me by Ronald O'Rourke of the Congressional Research Service, is so distributive and networked that it's reminiscent of the Borg aliens in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episodes, who are able, because of their collective mind, to simultaneously experience what only one of them witnesses. Instead of one big sonar device on a warship, there would be hundreds or thousands of hydrophones floating all over the ocean, each the size of a soda can, listening to submarines and sending information simultaneously.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

WOODROW WILSON

In our stroke for independence we struck a blow for all the world. Some men saw it then; all men see it now . . . Let us ponder our duties like men of conscience and temper our ambitions like men who seek to serve, not to subdue; the world; let us lift our thoughts to the level of the great tasks that await us, and bring a great age in with the coming of our day of strength.

"The Ideals of America," December 1902

And if the United States develops such technology, there is no guarantee that we could keep it from the open market. "Because of new surveillance measures, you could have whole zones of the ocean where you are unable to operate safely on the surface," Donald Henry, special assistant to the director of the Pentagon's Office of Net Assessment, told me. Technology and the risk of unconventional attacks "could drive navies underwater, unless carrier strike groups are protected by something we don't have yet." The faster technology progresses, the less likely people will play by our rules.

Meanwhile, as costs drive us toward that 150-ship Navy, we may need to delegate some tasks to private naval companies, in the same way that private contractors have been used on land in Iraq and Afghanistan. According to Navy Lieutenant Commander Claude Berube, who teaches at the U.S. Naval Academy, in an emergency we might even issue letters of marque, the way we did during the Revolutionary War, giving privateers the legal authority to act in our defense. Allowing privateers to help with, say, the drug-interdiction effort in the Caribbean would enable uniformed sailors to concentrate on the Pacific and Indian oceans.

More submarines might seem like a quick fix for many of these challenges. They operate under the surface. They are moving, underwater intelligence factories, able to listen to cell-phone conversations on land. They can launch missiles at targets on shore. Some are now being refitted so that they can clandestinely deliver Special Operations teams onto beaches. But the catch is that they are expensive. Each fast-attack, Los Angeles-class submarine costs easily more than \$1 billion in today's dollars, despite having much less general firepower than a comparably priced Arleigh Burke-class destroyer.

Today, the United States devotes 4.38 percent of its annual gross domestic product to defense. Before the Iraq War, it was 3.5 percent. Although two dozen or so countries spend more on defense than we do relative to GDP, we still spend more in absolute terms than much of the rest of the world combined. But if we are to maintain our current relative military advantage, we will have to spend at even higher rates. Admiral Morgan, the deputy chief of naval operations for information, plans, and strategy, told me that to maintain our naval primacy, we may need to devote close to 5 percent of GDP (assuming a growing economy) to defense. Yet it's unclear whether the American public will abide that.

During the Cold War, our 600-ship Navy needed to be in only three places in force—the Atlantic and Pacific flanks of the Soviet Union and the Mediterranean; we sometimes subcontracted out less-important tropical sealanes to other free-world navies (in this, Admiral Mullen's 1,000-ship fleet-in-being does have a recent precedent). Now we need to cover the Earth with less than half that number of ships. Decline can never be admitted as such until a rival makes demonstrable inroads into your power. But naval trends now appear to buttress political and economic ones that suggest that we are indeed headed for a world with multiple competing powers.

Of course, admirals will continue to march to Capitol Hill and declare that no matter the size of the budget, they will succeed in every mission. Managing decline requires "a degree of self-delusion," as Aaron Friedberg put it in his 1988 book, *The Weary Titan: Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline, 1895-1905*. "British statesmen," Friedberg observed, "continued to talk as if nothing of any significance" had occurred, even as they abandoned worldwide sea supremacy. Abandoning supremacy was, in Friedberg's view, a "prudent" and "sensible" strategy, given the economic and political realities of the time. And it didn't stop Britain from helping to save the world in succeeding decades.

We could do much worse. ▀

Robert D. Kaplan, a national correspondent for *The Atlantic*, is the Class of 1960 Distinguished Visiting Professor in National Security at the U.S. Naval Academy. His most recent book, *Hog Pilots, Blue Water Grunts: The American Military in the Air, at Sea, and on the Ground*, was published in September.

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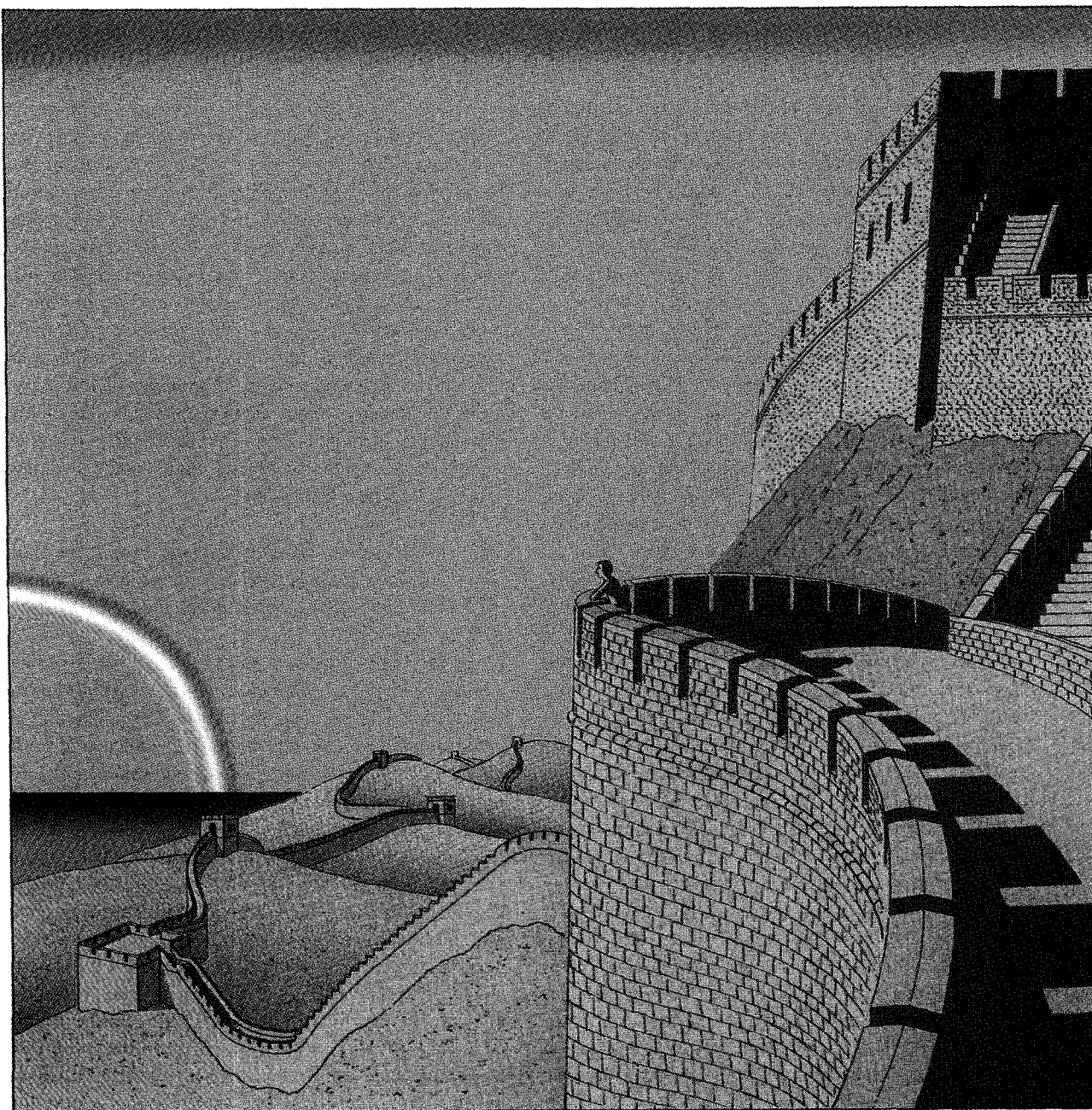
What living in England, Japan, and China has taught
one American about the character of his own country

BY JAMES FALLOWS

Illustration by Guy Billout

The View From There

For 150 years, *The Atlantic* has been trying to figure out the American idea. For a quarter of that time, I've been on the job myself. The process began in earnest the first time I set foot outside the country, in the summer of 1970, when I left for graduate school in England. The real work of debating and defining a country's prospects, of course, happens inside its borders. But I've found it very useful to think about America from afar. I know it's annoying and superior-sounding to say that you see a country most clearly from the outside. (Those poor homebound hicks! They don't get the big picture the way we cosmopolites can.) But at least in one way, it's certainly true. Inside America, we discuss what the country could and »



should become. Outside, we see what it is—which of its traits and habits really make it unusual, the effects of what it claims to stand for, what it actually does to the rest of the world.

I am living in China now mainly to learn about China, which is similar to the reasons my wife and I have previously lived or spent extensive stretches in Ghana, Malaysia, Japan, and other places. But inevitably, we are thinking and learning about what America is. And—surprise!—we are feeling good. I am more hopeful about America and its idea than I was even 18 months ago, before coming to China.

The details of this outlook are shaped by my previous cycles of judging America from overseas, so let me

explain three of the stages that led to my current, largely optimistic view. In England, I discovered that I was an American; in Japan, how essential America's ideas are to its strength; and now in China, that America's ideas are still the key to its vitality, if we don't abuse them or carelessly let them wither away.

In England in the early 1970s, I spent a lot of time grumbling with my American friends, and not just because we were spoiled. The United States was in a politically dark period then, and England's irritation with Richard Nixon or Lieutenant William Calley was often projected upon itinerant Americans. England itself was

literally dark—and clammy, and cold, and threadbare. In retrospect, it's obvious that the country had not yet fully recovered from World War II. *Cool Britannia* had a different connotation than it would a generation later under Tony Blair. There was no real heating in the buildings or plumbing in the bathrooms (or novocaine in the National Health Service dental "studios"!)—points we learned to make only among ourselves, since it was a cliché among the natives that only Americans would notice.

No one could avoid noticing the near-collapse of the U.K.'s social compact. For more than a month in 1971 we got no mail, because of a postal strike, and in those days, that really mattered. The country's "dust-men," or garbage collectors, went on a prolonged strike, too. For weeks on end, electricity was available only for limited hours per day, on a "rota" basis. I still shiver as I remember trying to page through economics texts by the flicker from candles while clad in overcoat, scarf, and little knitted gloves with the fingertips cut off, in the 4 p.m. December twilight in a library at Oxford. I fear that the circumstances made me less respectful of the views of the English economic theorists I was reading. My wife-to-be had what we considered a wonderful job, handling rats in an experimental-psych laboratory. England's tenderhearted animal-protection laws dictated that the rat buildings, unlike the people buildings, be fully heated, so I went to see her as often as I could.

After two years of this—and, yes, wonderful adventures, and close friends from many lands, and tremendous good fortune to have had such opportunities, and a wedding in an Oxford chapel to the same rat-handling expert I am married to today (it wasn't just the heated labs), and so on—I was ready to come home, with a new understanding of what home meant.

Traits I had considered my own personal quirks, or perhaps regionalisms as a Californian, were revealed as being stereotypically American. In one way or another they involved mobility—really, class. The cheese-separating state of the British economy in those days was less disturbing, to me, than the static social concept behind it. At some point English society must have been tumultuous, open, and rapidly changing, right? That is the world Charles Dickens depicted, and the one that economic historians like David Landes said was both a source and a sign of Britain's rapid industrialization in the mid-1800s.

It did not seem that way anymore. Like any tourist, I admired the aesthetic results of a society where people knew their place and where some, in effect, served as picturesque props. The butlers polishing brass knobs, the Cockney-accented "scout" who cleaned my college room and, no joke, kept calling me "Guv'nur." At center stage were the toffs in their campy Oxford college blazers, living a life out of Waugh.

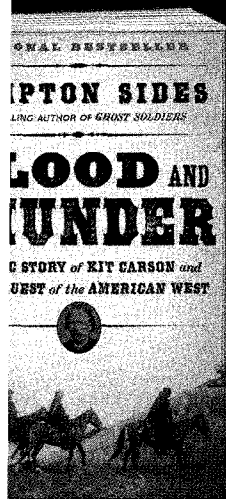
As an American, I got huffy about the idea that so many people felt born to their place, high or low, and by the very concept of "place" at all. While some of my American friends were poshing up their vowels and adopting Britishisms like "Brilliant!" or "full stop," my accent was becoming more and more ostentatiously American. The ideal I strove for was Jack Nicholson. Sure, America had its version of class markers and class barriers. But they were milder and more permeable, and Americans on the whole were embarrassed by their existence. Before coming to England, I had considered the Civil War America's most necessary struggle. As time went on, my thoughts turned admiringly to Lexington, Concord, and the Liberty Bell. America was coarser than England, but it was more independent, open, freer of class shackles. Being sure that it remained open—that as much as possible, Americans always had a second chance—took on new importance to me as a cause.

Living and studying in England taught me that America meant openness. Living in Japan and traveling through Asia underscored that message, with a vengeance.

Superficially, Japan's boom of the 1980s seems like China's today. Yes, both happened in Asia, both led to mammoth trade imbalances, both arose from combined governmental and private-industrial efforts, and both unnerved the United States. But the differences are more numerous than the similarities, and more important. Japan was and is rich; for China, that is decades away. Japan's debut as an international host with its Olympic Games was already 20 years in the past (Tokyo, 1964); China's is still ahead. To me the most striking difference was cultural and moralistic: specifically, Japan's cocksureness. Japan and many neighboring nations saw its rise as a challenge to the American idea, and they didn't care who knew it. No one thinks that today's China lacks cultural confidence. By now I should have programmed auto-text keys to use when transcribing interviews, so that I can plug in the rote passage about "our 5,000 years of history" or "the world's longest continuous civilization" with one stroke. But I have encountered virtually no lecturing from Chinese friends, officials, students, passersby, or interviewees.

People inside China have a vivid sense of the whack-a-mole challenge they face at every level. For rural people, staying alive. For the urban-employed class, finding enough money to pay for an apartment (with prices soaring), get kids into school (also expensive, with fees required even at public schools), fend off health emergencies (ditto), plus somehow save enough for retirement (in the midst of a huge demographic shift, driven by the one-child policy, toward a society with many more dependents and many fewer active workers). For company officials, managing China's current "brand image"

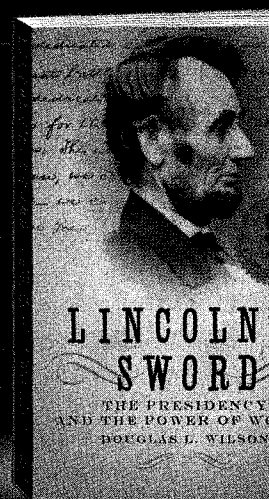
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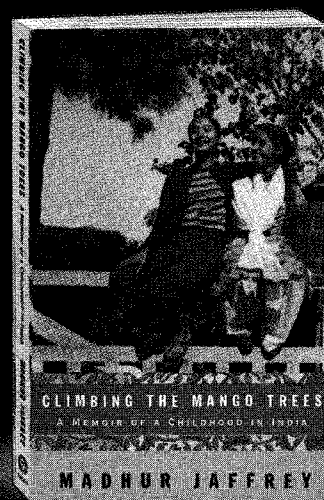


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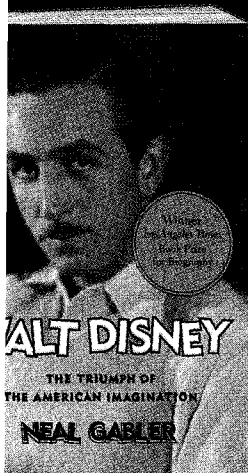
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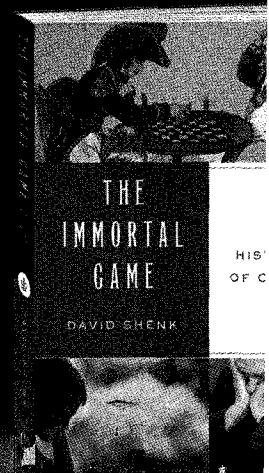
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disaster, plus the soaring costs of water, energy, and raw materials, plus the competition from thousands of other companies just like them. For regional officials, fending off complaints about pollution and corruption while still bringing in jobs. For the national government, managing all this and political and international crises too. Based on their record over the last 20 years, Chinese at all levels will probably find a way to stay just ahead of these disasters. But the situation doesn't leave many people I've met sounding boastful.

Japan was not like this. By the time I arrived there in 1986, Ezra Vogel's famed *Japan as Number One* had been on the market for several years. Vogel was arguing that many of Japan's practices deserved to be examined as influential new world models. But because of the title, the book was easily misunderstood as suggesting that Japan had actually become the No. 1 power. That was certainly the preferred interpretation of many of the Japanese officials and intellectuals I interviewed. For them, Japan and its concepts had won, which explicitly meant that America and its ideas had lost.

This attitude showed up even when you weren't looking for it. In Tokyo in 1989, I was summoned to meet Shintaro Ishihara, a bluff Pat Buchanan-like politician who was later elected governor of Tokyo. He was famous then for his book (written with Akio Morita) *No! to Ieru Nippon*, or *The Japan That Can Say No!*, which argued that Japan finally had the muscle to tell America to shut up. Behind it was the conceit that America had reached its crest—not just geostrategically, with its costly military commitments, nor just commercially, with the shoddy products it brought to market and its selfish refusal to save or conserve. Rather, America's failure involved its very essence, its fitness as a culture to compete. His book contrasted the chaos, disorder, and preening individualism that characterized America with the unity, harmony, and unspoken communication that supposedly made the Japanese into one smoothly functioning productive team. ("Supposedly" because, as Karel van Wolferen and other foreign critics noted, the "naturally" cooperative nature of Japanese society generally resulted from a firm system of incentives and constraints.) As applied to those inherent traits, "America in decline" was not an accusation but an assumed fact.

At one level, the Japanese claim of superior fitness raised worthy analytic issues. Twice in its history, Japan has achieved something not even modern China can claim: full technological parity with the mighty nations of the West. (The first was in the decades after Commodore Perry's arrival, when it modernized frantically to avoid the colonial humiliation that had befallen China; the second, of course, was after World War II.) But it was not Japan's strategy of "developmental economics" that constituted its real challenge to the American idea—American strategists

from Alexander Hamilton to Vannevar Bush would have felt perfectly at home with the idea of using state power to stimulate the growth of private industrial technologies. The racial and political elements of the Japanese model were something else again.

What did this mean for the American idea, or my understanding of it? From its start, America had been a rowdy place, the consequence of continually making room for new people, plans, and ideas. There was no sense in trying to be a second-rate Japan, though specific details in its economic and social approach ("patient capital," improving K-12 education) deserved close study. America's hope was to be more fully American—not more like them, our competitors, but *More Like Us*, as I called one book I wrote from Japan. That in turn meant more support for innovation, more embrace of immigration, more acceptance of the churn of dynamic disorder, more of the kind of public help—the GI Bill, public schools—that gave as many people as possible a fair chance. The American idea, as I saw it from Japan, was strength through radically opened opportunity. The good parts of the boom of the 1990s, the parts that preceded the bubble, were consistent with this approach: more room for immigrant talent, more public support for Americans seeking a second and third chance, balanced budgets to reduce the overhang of debt. The natural effect of globalization is to make all of these more difficult, as some people get richer (through an ever-larger market for their financial, corporate, professional, or entertainment skills) and others with less-specialized skills have to adapt more quickly to keep up. The inevitable rise of new barriers makes it all the more important to keep removing as many barriers as we can.

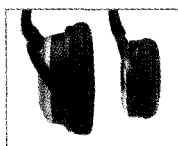
When I came to China, I naturally wondered if this might be the great challenger to the American idea. Certainly it has the scale to challenge almost anything it chooses. Barring catastrophe, sooner or later China will have the world's largest economy. That won't mean as much as it sounds: Since China has four times as many people as America, it need only reach one-fourth of America's per capita income to be No. 1 in total output. (The ratio now is something like one-seventh or one-sixth, depending on how you calculate and whose Chinese statistics you believe.) I've never heard a Chinese authority assert that China could draw even, in per capita terms, in the foreseeable future.

Is China warming up for the kind of challenge Americans fear? I know it can look that way. As I watch U.S. discussion from afar, I see the references to China's growing "soft power" (such reports are rarely filed by people based here), to its rising military budget (still a small fraction of America's), to the power it has gained through its hoard of U.S. dollars, to its confident assertions about the success of its upcoming Olympic Games, and to other

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signs of its potential chest-thumping. All I can report is how different the same issue seems here and how much less boastful talk I have encountered than I would have expected, and than I did in other parts of Asia during the previous Asian boom.

Yes, if you try hard enough, you can get some Chinese intellectuals or officials to say that their system might in some ways be proving itself "superior," as would befit a society with a 5,000-year heritage, etc. (Where is that auto-text key?) I've talked several times with a senior party official in Beijing who says that China's material success will eventually command respect for the political and cultural ideas that lie behind it. The first time I was summoned to see him, I was very nervous. I was told to come to Beijing for a meeting, and as I was whisked to the official's quarters in a shiny black Audi A8 (the car of the commissars) that blasted other traffic out of the way with a deafening Klaxon, I thought: This does not bode well. But the official, who turned out to be a friend of a Chinese friend of mine, wanted to talk about religion's role in public life: how it worked in America, how it might return to China. In many hours of subsequent talks, the very closest to a triumphal or scolding note I heard from him involved the practical problems of today's U.S.-style democracy.

"In the long run, China must be democratic," he told me on my latest visit. Everyone says that—without saying how many lifetimes away the "long run" might be. But even as China became democratic, this man said, it would need to be cautious about following every detail of a U.S. model. He talked about the Florida recount nightmare of the 2000 election and the crippling, constant need for American candidates to raise money. "I have observed that in Western democracy, those elected do not represent the general public," he said, Chomsky-like. And even when they do, "between elections you get maybe two years of stability to do any real work, then the campaigning begins again! The constant campaigns are a cost society has to pay." Even if you construed this as "anti-American"—as opposed to "accurate"—it is a far cry from what the likes of Shintaro Ishihara said when dancing on the corpse of the decadent U.S.

Yes, some Chinese intellectuals argue seriously that the country's rise proves the new vitality of Confucian truths. So, they suggest, this century, or the next one, or some future one ("It could take 500 years," my party-boss friend says) could be the era of world recognition of the great Asian traditions: Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. And for a final yes, if you try really hard, you can look for other rumblings suggesting China's great-power ambitions.

There is also the peculiar nature of today's "Chinese idea." I'll explore this topic more fully another time, but the most urgent axis of debate appears to be whether China stands for any "idea" at all. Many academics wring their hands about "kids today" who only want to get jobs

with the most prestigious international companies and buy the fanciest car; others say that's just a trend, that religion (or Confucianism, or Marxism, or something) will come back. Still others say that for the foreseeable future, it would be perverse for China to be distracted by any but practical concerns, since it has so much work to do there, especially on its environment.

What no one seems to contend is that China should be readying a major vision to impose on the world. Over the months, I've asked students, professors, public officials, businesspeople versions of these questions: When China is strong, what will it want of the world? What will it expect of other countries? Practically by birthright, Americans can answer such a question about America's expectations of the world. We want liberty; we want democracy; we have, as George W. Bush put it in his second inaugural address, the "great objective of ending tyranny."

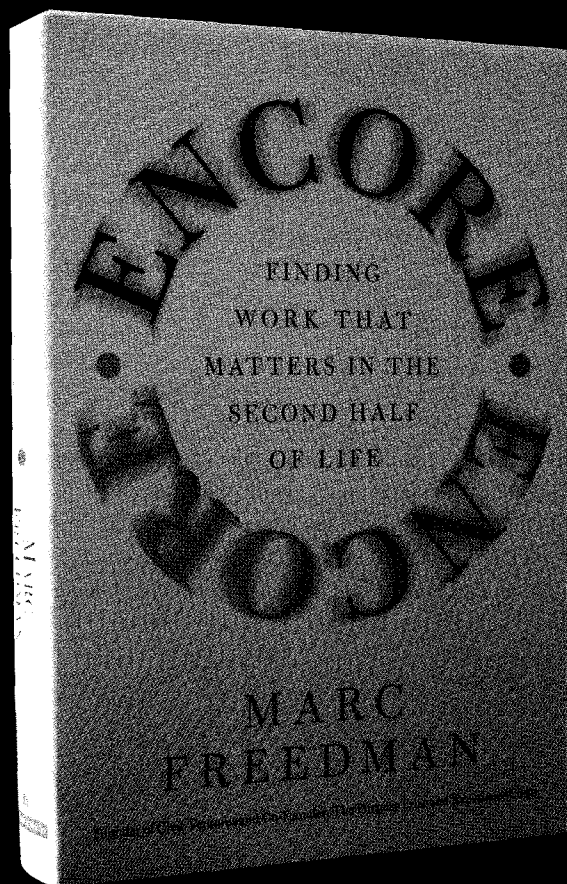
Whether by birthright or by current circumstances, few Chinese people have any answer to this question. Usually I am greeted with a puzzled or polite silence. If there is a response, it is something like "Recognition." Or "Respect."

I am not saying that a year's exposure to China has made me complacent or triumphalist. Through scale alone, China will be a handful. As I argued in a recent article about China's emergence as the world's factory ("China Makes, the World Takes," July/August *Atlantic*), Americans need to be actively thinking about how to protect their economic interests when dealing with China, how to help China limit its air and water pollution before it's too late for everyone, and how to engage China constructively in other ways.

But I am saying that for now, Americans shouldn't worry about an ideological challenge from China, or whether China's economic rise will soon mean the pre-eminence of the "Chinese idea." The people and leaders of China have too much else on their minds. What I've learned from China, so far, is that instead of girding to defend the American idea against some new foreign challenge, we should take the opportunity to shore it up, in three ways.

The first way is ensuring a particular kind of openness, which at all times has been the essence of America. The country needs to keep making room for its own people, while also continuing to make room for people from outside. It's not easy to achieve both goals, since in the short run, they conflict. The Americans most likely to be muscled aside by hungry outside talent are those with the odds against them in other ways. That's a reality. Rather than ignore the tension or use it as an excuse to close the borders, we have to find a way to reduce it. Otherwise, we cut off one of the two strengths (the other being military power) that no other country can possibly match.

A leading Chinese university, Jiao Tong of Shanghai, publishes an annual ranking of the best universities in



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the world, based on their research excellence. These are more sober assessments than the fanciful "Best College" charts in U.S. magazines, and they emphasize America's complete dominance of the field. On the latest Jiao Tong list, America has eight of the top 10 positions (exceptions: Cambridge and Oxford in England), and 17 of the top 20. (The other exception: the University of Tokyo, at 20.) China has zero of the top 100, and Japan has six. When I asked a Jiao Tong professor about the ranking, he said it was unfairly skewed, because American universities can take talent from everywhere else. *Yes*. We have to keep it that way, and for more than just universities.

Second is being idealistic but not consistent—or not foolishly consistent, as one of this magazine's founders put it 150 years ago. The United States can't and shouldn't be a status quo power. Consciously or not, most Americans believe that as the rest of the world modernizes, in crucial ways it will come to resemble us more and more. Let's skip for a moment the reasons

Finally, we should display the confidence, good humor, and thick-skinnedness befitting a country of our stature. When living in Japan, I heard accounts from many Japanese who had gone to the U.S. for business or study in the 1950s, after the Allied occupation ended. They looked at the factories and the farms and the vastness of America and asked themselves: What were we thinking? How could tiny Japan have imagined challenging the United States? After the Soviet Union fell and the hollowness of its system was exposed, many Americans asked: What were we thinking about "two superpower" competition with the U.S.S.R.? Its missiles were lethal and its ideology was brutal and dangerous. But a rival to America as an overall model? John F. Kennedy was only one of many to suggest as much, in his 1960 campaign references to the prestige gap as well as missile gap that had opened. Eventually, we all learned there was no comparison at all. I think if more Americans came to China right now and saw how hard so many of its people are struggling just to survive,

From its start, America was a rowdy place, the consequence of continually making room for new people, plans, and ideas.

why that belief is silly and instead recognize that it is very strong. It is part of our founding principle. The Declaration of Independence spoke of "the course of human events," not the complaints of the American colonists. The constant arrival of immigrants reminds us that people from around the world actually do want to become Americans. (A few hours before writing this, I heard from a young woman in the hinterland of Sichuan Province: "My dream, to go to America!") Globalization has had a large Americanizing component—that's part of the complaint against it. While any sensible person wants to learn as much from other cultures as possible, Americans are bound to think that we have something to tell others about individual potential, about the idea of equality, about respect for civil liberties. The rest of the world understands this, which is why our recent infringements on our own civil liberties are so damaging to our image worldwide.

But retaining that idea doesn't mean believing two apparently consistent corollaries: that everyone else actually does want to be like us, and that it is within our power to force or entice them to. Believing this makes us believe that other countries—Japan a generation ago, China today—are just about to become America-like, and that if they resist, they can be forced to comply. (To say nothing of Iraq.) Speak for our values, yes, and clearly. Be deluded about them, no.

they too might ask: What are we thinking, in considering China an overall threat? Yes, its factories are formidable, and its weight in the world is huge. But this is still a big, poor, developing nation trying to solve the emergency of the moment. Susan Shirk, of the University of California at San Diego, recently published a very insightful book that calls China a "fragile superpower." "When I discuss it in America," she told me, "people always ask, 'What do you mean, *fragile*?' " When she discusses it here in China, "they always ask, 'What do you mean, *superpower*?' "

Foreign examples are useful spurs to internal action. Sputnik served that purpose 50 years ago, and Japan's industrial successes led to valuable changes in American corporate and fiscal practices nearly a generation ago. A look at China can help America address its main shortcomings—reckless fiscal and foreign policies, delay in moving away from dependence on oil—and perhaps also suggest ways the nations can work together on challenges, mainly environmental, that threaten them and others.

But let's not panic. Let's show the patient confidence—Lincoln, Marshall, Eisenhower—that is part of the American idea. Let's not look for slights or imagined insults to react to. Among our worst enemies at the moment is our own hair-trigger mentality about foreign challenge, and the enemies that outlook generates. Our idea is strong. We should act as if we know that. ■

James Fallows is an Atlantic national correspondent.

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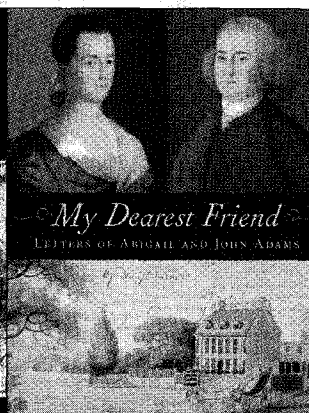
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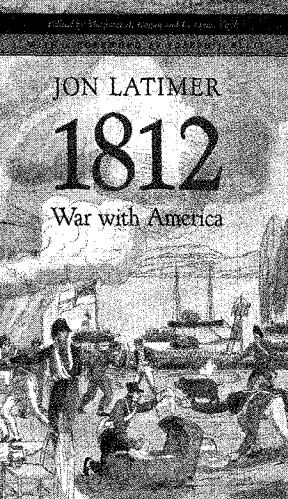
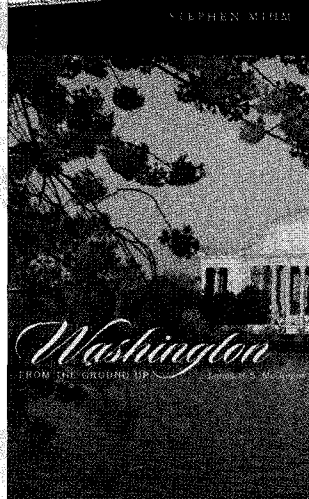


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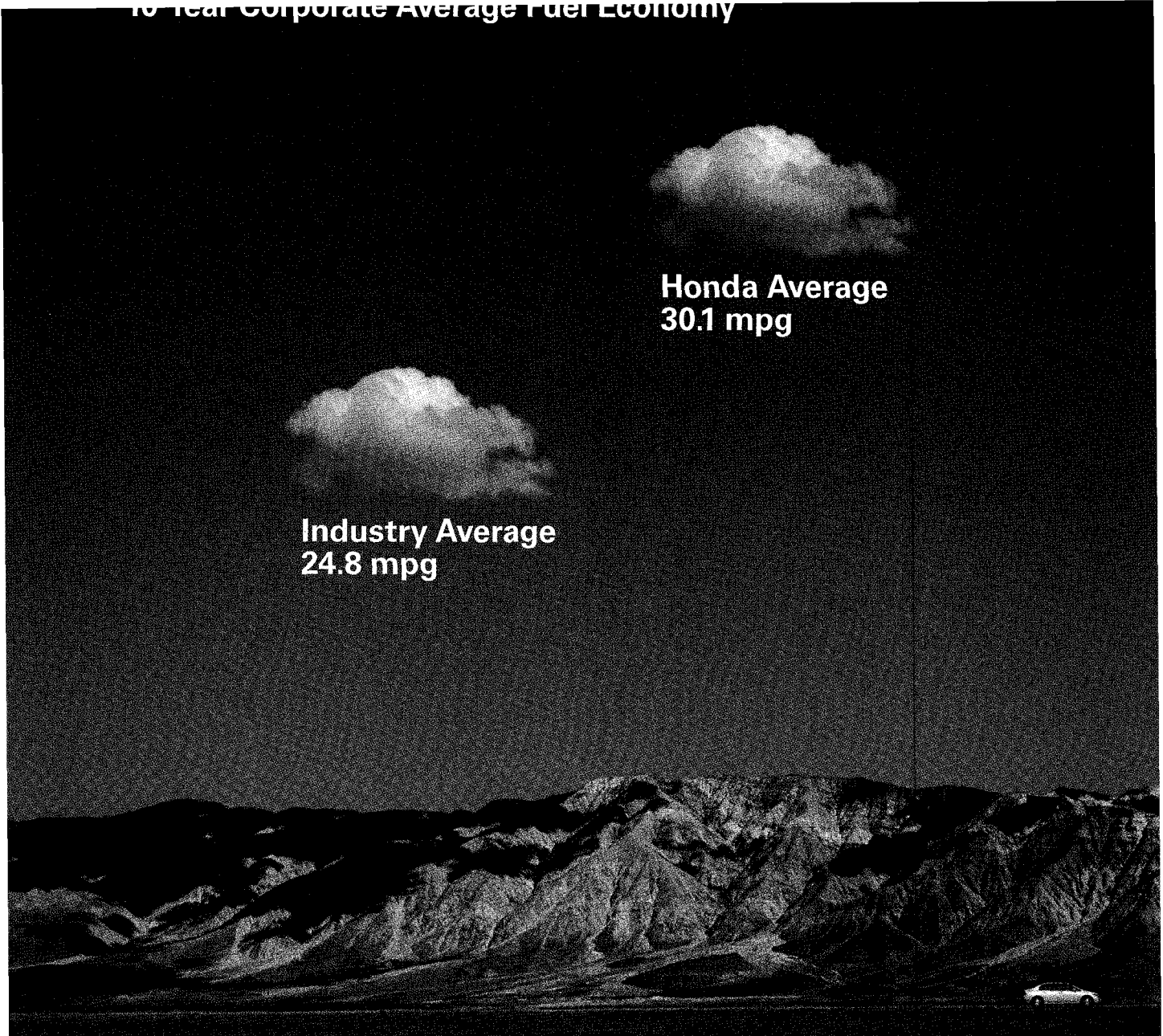
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The Power of Dreams

BOOKS

Editor's Choice: Moviemaking in Hollywood's classical period was colossally complex, backbreakingly difficult, obscenely expensive—and it almost always failed.

Toiling in the Dream Factory

BY BENJAMIN SCHWARZ

The movies made during the studio era—what the cineastes have dubbed “the classical Hollywood cinema”—are, along with jazz, America's best creative work from the late 1920s to about 1950. But although those pictures are revered, they're contested. Products of a system run by five vertically integrated companies, they spark ardent and surprisingly nasty debates—about the relationships between art and commerce, convention and innovation, individual and collaborative effort, administrative constraint and creative freedom. These boil down to a single argument: Were the great pictures made because of, or despite, that system? To be sure, plenty in these books could be used in a hackneyed indictment of the studios as fiendish machines that stifled individual creativity, talent, and vision.

More important, any Hollywood history illuminates the dichotomy between those movies that the system most highly prized and those we love now, raising some doubts about the much-vaunted “genius of the system.” MGM under its production head and later special-projects producer Irving Thalberg (Fitzgerald's model for *The Last Tycoon*) was the most factory-like and systematized studio, with the biggest and most shimmering collection of stars. When Jeanine Basinger and Marc Norman expatiate about the methods and practices of “the studios,” they're usually describing processes that only MGM had the organizational wherewithal to realize fully. Its luxe “product” was considered Hollywood's best. But many of its luminaries (Norma Shearer, say) and its self-important “prestige” pictures (*Rose-Marie*, *Romeo and Juliet*) long



READY FOR HER CLOSE-UP:

Bette Davis on the set of *Jezebel*, 1938.

WARNER BROS./FIRST NATIONAL/THE KOBAI COLLECTION

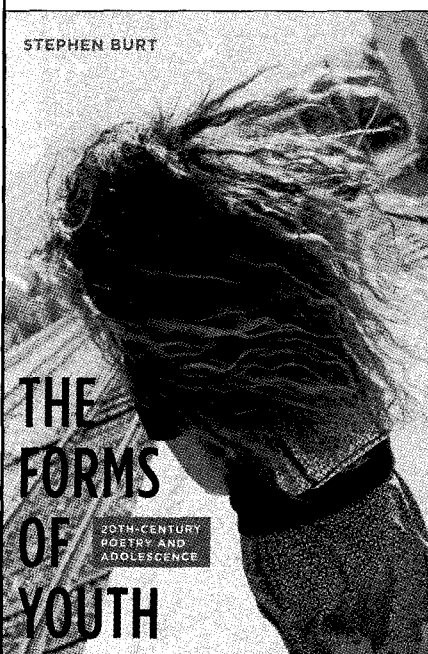
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Stephen Burt



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— James Longenbach,
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ago lost their magic; glamour, unlike style, is inherently ephemeral. True, the mystique of Metro's greatest star, Garbo, remains undiminished. But for the most part, those pictures Hollywood thought would endure (Metro's lofty movies from the 1930s, Warner Brothers' ponderous "artistically ambitious" Paul Muni biopics of Socially Progressive men) are now far overshadowed by the studio era's stylish entertainments, whether rollicking (*My Man Godfrey*), effervescent (*Trouble in Paradise*), light-headedly lovely (the Fred and Ginger movies, the highest and purest "art" Hollywood ever produced), hard-boiled (*Double Indemnity*), or high-trash melodramatic (*Dark Victory*)—movies no one thought would be watched in 10 years, let alone 70.

At the height of the classical era, each major studio released at least a movie a week. Organized along industrial lines, the studios had staffs of readers to find stories (MGM's had to be proficient in at least one foreign language), writers, technicians, costumers, art directors, cinematographers, directors, film editors, and actors—an army of well-paid, talented, intensely skilled people working on tight production schedules at breakneck speed. Over this presided the central producer, who—in some cases directly, in some cases through a small number of associate producers—conducted contract negotiations, developed stories and scripts, assigned directors, and edited the pictures. This system engendered two seemingly contradictory results. In the interests of brisk and efficient storytelling, the studios—shot by shot, sequence by sequence, cut by cut—achieved a seamless and uniform style. But just as the Hollywood movie came to have a specific look, so the movies of each of the studios or of their smaller production units (the biopic unit at Warner's, the Astaire/Rogers unit at RKO) developed a

signature style, thanks to the consistent way they were written, lit, photographed, directed, and edited, the way their costumes and sets were designed, even the way their film was processed.

Of course the prejudices and self-images of the studios and of the men running them helped shape that style. But the elements that defined it served and revolved around only one set of people: the stars, for whom most of the studio-era movies functioned as "vehicles," delivering them to their public and broadening and enhancing their appeal. Among the highest-paid people in the country, stars were the primary engines driving one of America's most profitable industries. They taught generations of Americans—specifically young, middle-class women, the viewers for whom most of the pictures were made—how to light a cigarette, wear a suit, kiss, decline or accept a pass, how a gentleman ought to behave.

The Star Machine examines how the studios manufactured and maintained the stars' personas, and how, in turn, the stars responded to and maneuvered in the studios' often suffocating embrace. Basinger goes over ground well tilled in Andrew Walker's *Stardom* and, in a more scholarly and precise way, in two extraordinary works of history, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, by David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson; and Tino Balio's more recent *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930–1939*. Her potted biographies of an eccentric assortment of screen idols (she eschews the era's biggest stars) make this, at some 600 pages, a work at once bloated and elliptical. But her dissection of, for example, Errol Flynn's and Irene Dunne's overlooked careers is perceptive, and the case she builds for their strengths is cogent. Moreover, almost nothing about the movies makes sense

THE STAR MACHINE

by Jeanine Basinger
Knopf

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:

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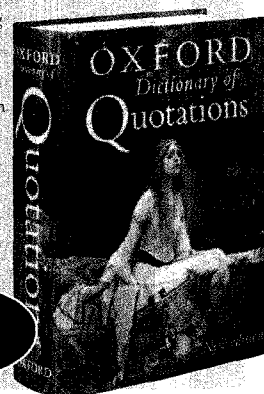
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without the stars—not the directors, not the screenwriters—at the center of the story, because their fame and appeal pretty much exclusively ensured a market for Hollywood’s product in what was a notoriously risky and unstable business. As Balio starkly puts it, “In economic terms, stars created the market value of motion pictures.”

Too important a commodity to be left to chance, stars were made, not born. They were subjected to studio-directed dentistry and surgery, and were taught how to walk, to speak, even to breathe. Then their personas were just as meticulously and methodically manufactured. A studio would cast a potential star in many small, wildly different roles, and

To control the images they so assiduously and expensively developed and to safeguard their irreplaceable assets, the studios deployed the notorious “option contract,” which normally gave them control over actors’ roles and public appearances and bound actor to studio—but not studio to actor—for seven years. If an actor refused a role, the studio could tack on the time the actor sat out to the end of the contract—an extraordinary practice that was rescinded only in 1945 when, in a suit brought against Warner’s by the demure and wide-eyed Olivia de Havilland (poor Melanie!), the California Supreme Court famously upheld a ruling that the clause violated the state’s anti-peonage laws.

unusually intelligent Davis suffered all the indignities and frustrations the star machine could dole out. Put through some two dozen movies in her first four years in Hollywood, she was done up as a platinum-blond flirt and a vamp. Even after she won acclaim, her studio, Warner’s, seemed perversely unwilling to give her consistently good roles. She refused a part assigned her, flamboyantly went on suspension, and was forced to return. Warner’s then bought *Jezebel* for her, the movie that made her a star and gave her her first serious—and strict—direction (by William Wyler). But for every great part she was assigned (dying finely in *Dark Victory*, loving the man she killed in *The Letter*, nobly self-sacrificing in *Now, Voyager*), she’d get a rotten one. Her salary grew enormously and she was given more vacation time, but Warner’s never granted her total control over her roles (her greatest turn, in *All About Eve* in 1950, was as a freelance at the end of the studio era).

Davis has been the subject of a number of good biographies and wrote *The Lonely Life*, her characteristically flinty, self-dramatizing, and unsurprisingly well-written autobiography. (A strictly educated Yankee—her grandmother found her Spartan boarding school through an ad in this magazine—Davis read avidly and widely; I own her copy of David M. Potter’s pretty arcane *History and American Society*.) So Ed Sikov, who concentrates on Davis’s work rather than her intense love life, has very little new information to dish. But his *Dark Victory* joins James Spada’s *More Than a Woman* as one of the two best Davis biographies. While his is an admiring and even affectionate portrait, Sikov refuses to attribute Davis’s truculent personality wholly to her experience in Hollywood. Although his account makes plain how Davis at once craved stardom and held its process in contempt (now there’s a crazy-making combination), Sikov makes equally plain why he concludes that “Davis was an angry woman for reasons nobody who knew her ever adequately explained to me and for reasons I still cannot fully understand.”

FROM THE ARCHIVES

PAULINE KAEI

Marlon Brando was explosively dangerous without being “serious” in the sense of having ideas. There was no theory, no cant in his leadership. He didn’t care about social position or a job or respectability, and because he didn’t care he was a big man: for what is less attractive, what makes a man smaller, than his worrying about his status? Brando represented a contemporary version of the free American ...

He was our angry young man—the delinquent, the tough, the rebel—who stood at the center of our common experience. When, as Terry Malloy in *On the Waterfront*, he said to his brother, “Oh Charlie, oh Charlie ... you don’t understand. I could have had class. I could have been a contender. I could have been somebody, instead of a bum—which is what I am,” he spoke for all our failed hopes. It was the great American lament.

“Marlon Brando: An American Hero,” March 1966

test audience response to each. This inherently humiliating, usually fruitless, and always exhausting process—Gable made 17 movies in his first three years at MGM—ensured that novices soon became professionals on the set and in front of the camera. (Movies can never again approach the craftsmanship the studios commanded when their employees at every level, from grips to stars, worked six-day weeks, month in and month out.)

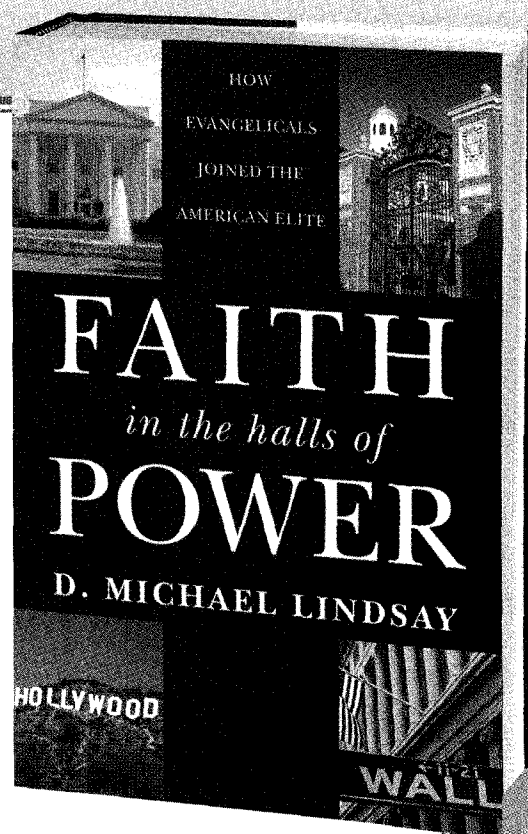
No wonder Hollywood’s “golden age” is a history of driven, freakishly hardworking, unhappy people, including its show-horse stars—with such exceptions as the thoroughly louché and blithe Flynn and the preternaturally serene (and happily married) Dunne. And no one was more unhappy than four-times married, two-times Oscar-winning Bette Davis, an actress whose high-strung, spiky screen persona famously matched her personality. The

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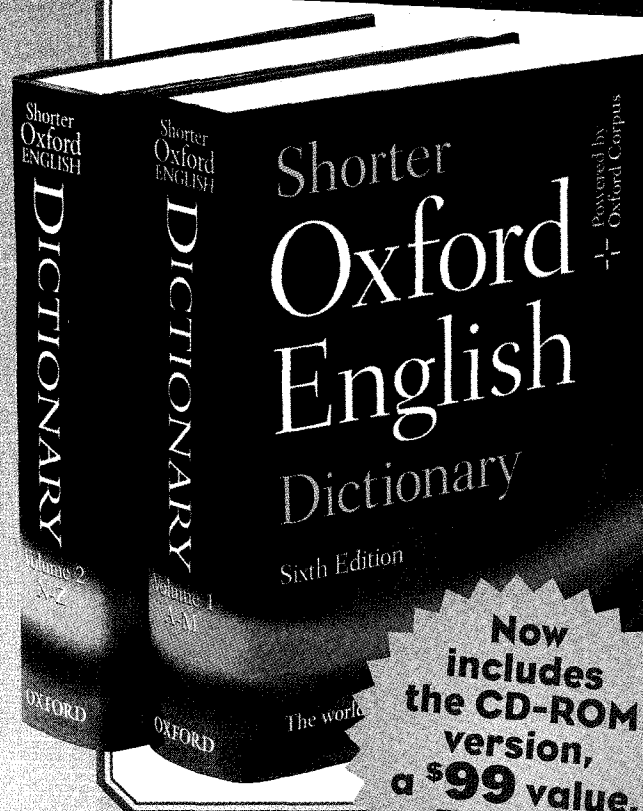
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If there was a group in Hollywood as Langry as Davis, it would have to be the screenwriters—the “schmucks with Underwoods,” Jack Warner called them, and not without some justification, as Marc Norman unintentionally shows. His brisk *What Happens Next* recounts the history of American screenwriting from the silents to 2005, but its cynosure is the studio era, a period he writes about with romanticism and passion. Norman advances the familiar tale in which the moguls and “the system” are cast as the heavies, constantly thwarting the artistic ambition and vision of the witty, politically engaged screenwriters who, lured by easy cash (MILLIONS ARE TO BE GRABBED OUT HERE AND YOUR ONLY COMPETITION IS IDIOTS, Herman Mankiewicz famously wired Ben Hecht, one of his New York chums), took the Sante Fe Super Chief to the Coast. The studios, Norman insists, had devised “a system to defeat caring,” and “the moguls did not understand [the writers]; they knew of employees’ pride, but pride in their attendance record, years of service, not the writer’s pride that came from making something never before seen.”

Leaving aside the fact that it was the moguls, not the writers, who rightly experienced the pride of “making something never before seen,” the film historian Thomas G. Schatz offered a more convincing explanation of writers’ discontent in *The Genius of the System*:

Few eastern writers made it as screenwriters. The most successful transition was made by journalists like Ben Hecht and Robert Benchley, who were accustomed to deadlines and copy editors and writing for an anonymous public that liked its information meted out in economical and dramatic doses ... Journalists shared with veteran screenwriters a tendency to think of their work more as a craft than as an art. They rarely considered what they wrote their own, and put little stock in creative control ... They understood the movie business—and that it was a business.

More important, what would the screenwriters have offered in place of the studio system’s slick—and at their best,

smart and chic—entertainments? Norman approvingly tells the story of one of those dreary, self-congratulatory, politically progressive evenings that Hollywood is all but genetically predisposed to organize. This one, in support of the Loyalist cause in Spain, featured the reading of “a bitter antiwar play,” after which Donald Ogden Stewart speechified, “exhorting those there to make movies with meaning: ‘Let us have no more million-dollar revolving staircases ... but let us have some simple truths, as we have had tonight ... on a bare stage, against nothing but a plain background.’” Fun, fun. And then there’s another hero of Norman’s chronicle, Howard Koch, “a serious New York dramatist, quiet, thoughtful,” who was brought in to revise the *Casablanca* script. Koch recalled that the picture’s director, Michael Curtiz, whom Norman wrongly dismisses as “never more than a facile studio journeyman” (Curtiz also artfully directed for Warner’s the charming and dashing Errol Flynn swashbucklers, the great noirish melodrama *Mildred Pierce*, and the exuberant *Yankee Doodle Dandy*), “leaned strongly on the romantic elements.” But Koch wanted to transform a movie whose great appeal would be, as Pauline Kael wrote, its “schlocky romanticism” into a *movie with meaning*, and so he pushed for “the political intrigues with their relevance to their struggle against fascism.” Now that would have been the way to go.

The cure Norman’s schmucks with Underwoods proffered was, of course, the great monster that has always beset the pictures and has stifled them in ways crass commercialism never could: the deadly urge to make *movies with meaning*—ones that, as they used to say, “the Industry can be proud of.” Kael (in pretty much everything she wrote) and Joan Didion (in “I Can’t Get That Monster Out of My Mind”) most memorably exposed the lures and dangers of making Important Films and message-y pictures that flatter our image of ourselves. Literary types fall easily under its spell, though the moguls (Thalberg, for example) have also submitted to it, and when they have, they’ve given us stately and all but

forgotten prestige pictures (*Gentlemen's Agreement*)—and, recently, the thankfully all but forgotten *American Beauty* as well as the soon to be forgotten *Crash*.

The anger of the frustrated writers was always easy to understand, but why was everyone else in Hollywood so despondent? It has to do, I think, with movies' promise and their inevitable failure to reach it fully. In the opening scene of the play on which *Jezebel* was based, the character played by Davis greets the other characters as she walks onstage. In the movie, Davis rides up to her mansion at a gallop, dismounts, and almost imperceptibly scoops up the hem of her dress from the back with her riding crop. Wyler sensed that the gesture, if made with offhand self-possession, would instantly establish character. He also knew that if he told Davis what he wanted, the move would be too studied. So he made the increasingly angry actress do 48 takes before she got it right. A movie contained thousands of such crucial moments, each with a hundred different moving parts, and with cast and crew assembled, time cost big money. And despite enormous expenditures, no matter how many takes were devoted to each shot, inescapably many moments wouldn't live up to their potential.

Moviemaking was colossally complex, backbreakingly difficult, obscenely expensive—and it almost always failed. Even the meanest and coarsest of the moguls, Columbia's Harry Cohn, in describing the Sisyphean task of feeding the exhibitors' and the public's insatiable appetite, betrayed the bleak and despairing hope:

"Every Friday the front door opens and I spit a movie out into Gower Street ... I want one good picture a year ... and I won't let an exhibitor have it unless he takes ... the Blondies, the low-budget Westerns and the rest of the junk we make ... To get one [good picture] I have to shoot five or six, and to shoot five or six I have to keep the plant going."

It was a recipe for misery. ▀

Benjamin Schwarz is *The Atlantic's* literary editor and national editor.

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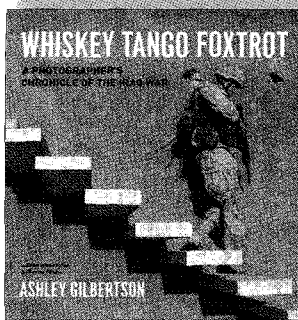
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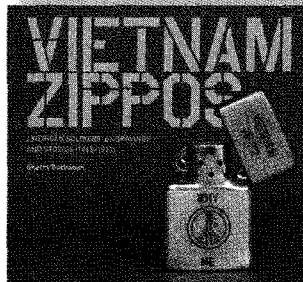
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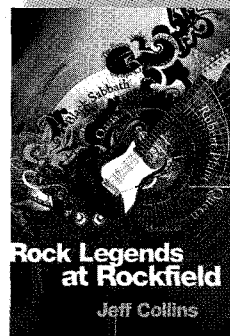
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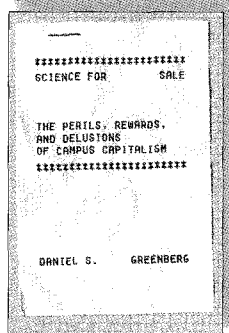
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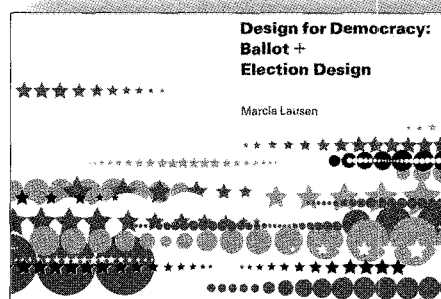
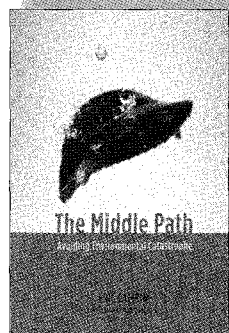
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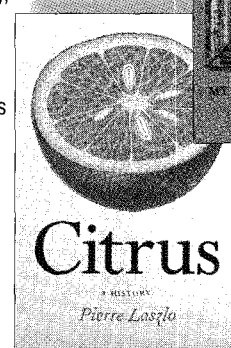
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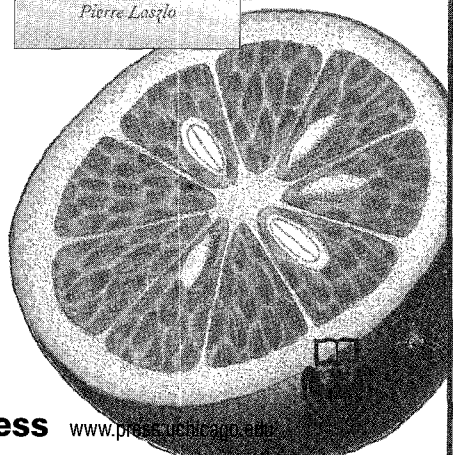
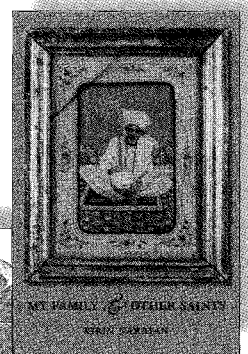
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BOOKS

One woman's estrangement from Hillary Rodham Clinton

No Girlfriend of Mine

BY CAITLIN FLANAGAN

Sometimes I imagine Betty Currie (remember her?) starting another long morning of her golden retirement. She pours a cup of coffee, glances at the headlines of the newspaper on the kitchen table, and then, with a sigh of infinite resignation, she cinches the belt on her dressing gown a little tighter, finds a plastic bag, and heads to the bathroom to clean the litter box of a former celebrity.

When I first heard, during the strange final days of Bill Clinton's presidency, that the first couple were going to jettison Socks, the family cat, I assumed that it was one of those weird rumors that attach themselves to the Clintons, in this case one easily dispelled: a single photograph of the kitty happily curled up on a

window seat in his new home, and that would be the end of it. But then, as so often happens with weird rumors that attach themselves to the Clintons, the story turned out to be 100 percent true. Reporters asked Bill about it during a press conference, and he hemmed and hawed. As the final days passed by—which, as you may recall, included a newsy sluice of pardons and outrages, hardly a time when journalists had to invest minor incidents with greater importance—reporters couldn't quite get their heads around the business with the cat.

In this hour of crisis, the official Socks the Cat Fan Club sent an inquiry to its namesake's most stalwart champion. Hillary's Senate office replied with

a note—at once chilly and patronizing—suggesting, more or less, that they butt out.

In the annals of human evil, off-loading a pet is nowhere near the top of the list. But neither is it dead last, and it is especially galling when said pet had been deployed for years as an all-purpose character reference. All presidential pets become famous, but the national affection for Socks during his time in the White House was unexpected and politically miraculous. He did the impossible: He humanized the Clintons. Socks stood for Chelsea (whose cloistering lent her allure) and for something Hillary desperately wanted us to understand about herself:

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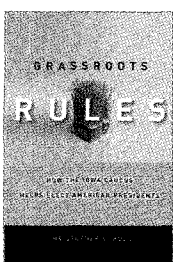
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that no matter how powerful or successful she becomes, first and foremost, she's a mom; that no matter how incomprehensible her marriage may appear to outsiders, at its deep center is the only imperishable bond a man and a woman can share—a child. Conveying these two simple facts during the long and punishing 1992 campaign had eluded Hillary, and by the time the family was crating up its belongings to move to the White House, even those of us who had helped punch their ticket thought they were odd ducks.

But then a group of photographers baited Socks with catnip outside the governor's mansion in Little Rock, and the rest is history. They shot some adorable pictures, and by the next day Socks was a front-page cat. The vast group of Americans (schoolchildren, mothers, teachers, old folk, simpletons) who share a good-natured, apolitical enthusiasm for the particulars of White House domestic life—and who were suddenly high and dry with a first lady who didn't bake cookies, a president with a trail of girlfriends, and a daughter who was rightly shielded from a vicious press—had finally, finally been given something to work with.

Hillary started taking Socks with her on personal appearances, and a cartoon version of him was installed on the White House Web site, so that children could take virtual tours of the building with Socks as their guide. And then, of course, there was Hillary's crowd-pleaser, *Dear Socks, Dear Buddy: Kids' Letters to the First Pets*. The book showcases the way Hillary wanted to be seen as a first lady: not an aesthete like Jackie, not a shopaholic like Nancy, not a country-club dowager like Bar. Hillary wanted to be seen as warm, spontaneous to the point of being a little bit silly sometimes; someone who always has a twinkle in her eye whenever children are around. The book is, perforce, cloying, super-cute,

and pun-riddled, and it would stand today merely as a curio if Hillary had—for once in her life—avoided her characteristic flaw. If only she had resisted the urge to drift past the homey anecdotes and family photographs, everything would have been fine. But, Hillary being Hillary, she had to turn the book into a lecture on pet care, and the person whose shining example we should all follow was none other than Hillary herself.

In *Dear Socks, Dear Buddy*, we are hectored never to give away a pet, always to regard one as an "adoption instead of an acquisition," and to be forever on guard for its physical safety (cold comfort to

Buddy, who had barely sniffed his first Chappaqua crotch before the poor beast ran off and got killed by a car, as had the Clintons' previous dog, the much-loved but equally ill-tended Zeke). Hillary tells us that the Clintons "didn't take on the responsibility of our pets lightly," and more than anything, the reader is left with a vivid impression of Socks's central position in the heart of the Clinton family: When they arrived in Washington, they brought with them from Little Rock their "family traditions, favorite pictures, and personal mementos to make the White House feel more comfortable." But it was only when Socks appeared on the scene—bringing with him his "toy mouse"—that "this

house became a home." (Hillary's literary exploitation of Socks continued long after she discarded him. On the second-to-last page of her memoir *Living History*, she offers a dreamy, after-the-ball portrait of her family savoring their last days in the White House: wandering down to the Children's Garden one last time, Chelsea and Hillary admiring the handprints of former presidents' grandchildren, Bill tossing the ball for Buddy, while Socks ... "kept his distance.")

Hillary's insistence that we follow her example in pet ownership, when

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she should really be on *Cat Fancy's* Most Wanted list, makes her a tiresome bore. But exploiting the emotions of good-natured people (including "many of the retired servicemen and women who live at the U.S. Soldiers' and Airmen's Home in Washington, D.C.," whose bravery and patriotism she honored by having them send out kitty-cat "greetings" to Socks's correspondents)—well, that's just another example of her three-decade-long drift from the girl she once was to the woman that circumstance and ambition have made her.

Although I have little interest in national politics, I've long been attracted to Hillary, because the issues that most move me are those that have most moved her. I even wrote her a fan letter in the early 1990s, when I was a court-appointed special advocate in the Children's Dependency Court in Los Angeles, working in the field that had been her first calling. To read Carl Bernstein's *A Woman in Charge* is to be struck by the depth of this woman's early commitment to poor children and her willingness to devote herself, body and mind, to their plight. She is not a person who stumbled upon the cause of "social justice," as the Methodist Church of her childhood would have understood it, as a means of political gain, or as a fashionable response to the social upheaval of the '60s. She got involved because she was a particularly earnest young person, whose moral sensibility was shaped by a religion that called for its believers to put their faith into action.

Today we are overly familiar with the self-serving, Ivy League-bound youngster's frantic eagerness to insinuate herself into the lives of poor folk ("Hang in there, La'Shelle—I'm applying Early Action!") so that she will have something to write on the community-service section of her application. But two generations ago, the sorts of things that Hillary did as a teenager—volunteering to babysit the children of migrant workers, traveling to a Chicago slum to check for voter-registration fraud, trekking to a 1961 sermon by Martin Luther King Jr.—were the purview, not of the résumé-padding

smart set, but rather of a small army of very square white kids, from mainline Protestant churches. The Methodism of Hillary's youth went hand in hand with the civil-rights doctrine of King, and the two are largely responsible for the shape of her early career, which is one of breathtaking accomplishment and purpose.

If you want to have a sense of what Hillary was like when she was interested in policy, rather than electoral politics, take a look at her seminal 1973 essay for

nudging a workable—and humane—solution through the thickets and deadwood of constitutional law. True, as I can testify, the solution that Hillary proposed here and that the dependency-court system largely adopted replaced a huge mess with another huge mess: The massive legal system now overseeing the fate of children who have been removed from their parents' care is a slow-moving beast that channels lawyers and legal briefs—and a panicky, cover-your-ass devotion

FROM THE ARCHIVES

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

No single individual, of course, and no single group has an exclusive claim to the American dream. But we have all, I think, a single vision of what it is, not merely as a hope and an aspiration, but as a way of life, which we can come ever closer to attaining in its ideal form if we keep shining and unsullied our purpose and our belief in its essential value ...

If many of our young people have lost the excitement of the early settlers, who had a country to explore and develop, it is because no one remembers to tell them that the world has never been so challenging, so exciting ... There is still unfinished business at home, but there is the most tremendous adventure in bringing the peoples of the world to an understanding of the American dream. In this attempt to understand and to give a new concept of the relationships of mankind, there is open to our youngsters an infinite field of exciting adventure, where the heart and the mind and the spirit can all be engaged. Perhaps the older generation is often to blame with its cautious warning: "Take a job that will give you security, not adventure." But I say to the young: "Do not stop thinking of life as an adventure. You have no security unless you can live bravely, excitingly, and imaginatively; unless you can choose a challenge instead of a competence."

"What Has Happened to the American Dream?" April 1961

the *Harvard Educational Review*, "Children Under the Law," in which she argued that children should receive legal representation as a means of guaranteeing that their best interests would truly be the aim of any court case, including those involving abuse or neglect. Unlike her more recent literary efforts, this, far from being a vehicle through which to present the most advantageous image of its author, is the work of a shrewd, lawyerly mind grappling with a thorny problem and

to documentation and paperwork—into dicey situations that often get dicier the longer they stay in court.

What's more, her engagement with the issue bears all the markings of Hillary projects as we have come to know them: She saw a great wrong, and she wanted to right it; she was terrific on the details but blind to human weakness; and so the elegance of her reasoning was undone by the mess and squalor of the world as it actually exists.

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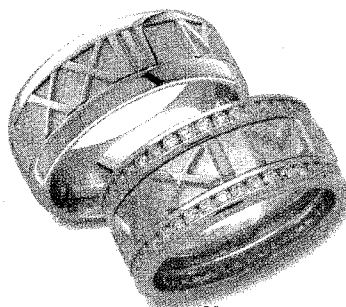
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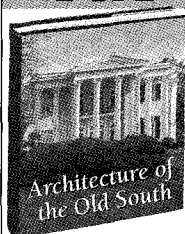
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A combination of strengths and weaknesses like this makes for someone I would consider highly admirable and human; someone, in fact, who once so dazzled me that when I was teaching in Los Angeles, I managed to get the single ticket my school received to a speech that Hillary gave at Scripps College. Though I arrived bonded to Hillary by our passion for children's welfare, and though the fact that the president of Scripps had been a friend of Hillary's in law school seemed to promise the sort of woman-to-woman conversation I'm a sucker for, the afternoon was a bust. Hillary did try to be warm and chatty. The subject of panty hose, I seem to recall, was discussed in the banter preceding her formal address. But something freakish in her voice or inflection—you know what I mean—made me want to flee. Hillary can't talk about panty hose. It's cringe-inducing to watch her try to talk about any of the subjects that normally would cement a bond between women, because there's nothing more uncomfortable than witnessing someone straining to be natural. On paper she's equally off-putting, lapsing into the didactic and the sanctimonious when presenting material meant to be personal, as in *Dear Socks*, *Dear Buddy*; *It Takes a Village*; and *Living History*. (For some mystifying reason, Hillary is determined, in the face of every ghastly bit of evidence to the contrary, to present her private life as an example for the rest of us. It's like watching someone get up every day and try to drive a Hummer across a balsa-wood bridge.)

Not long ago, Hillary appeared at a La Raza conference, and once onstage in front of a huge crowd, she told her interviewer that they should talk like "two girlfriends." This tack seems to be the latest in Hillary's ongoing effort to humanize herself. In the campaign, she clearly believes that her automatic advantage with the female half of the electorate is best pressed by forging this type of personal connection, commiserating with us in our lots as wives and mothers. This type of intimacy requires a brand of vulnerability, and as a woman who has seen her share of glass ceilings, who has

struggled to balance career and family, and who has known the complex humiliations of marital infidelity, Hillary is not without relevant material. But it's in these matters, the intimate matters most likely to be both fascinating and helpful to other women, that she finds she can't outrun her past.

Hillary's girlfriend-to-girlfriend moment was awkward because if she wanted to talk that way she would have to be willing to let us women in on the big, underlying struggle of her life that is front and center in our understanding of who she is as a woman. Her husband's sexual behavior, quite apart from the private pain that it has caused her, has also sullied her deepest—and most womanly—ideals and convictions, for the Clintons' political partnership has demanded that she defend actions she knows to be indefensible. To call her husband a philanderer is almost to whitewash him, for he's used women far less sophisticated, educated, and powerful than he—women particularly susceptible to the rake's characteristic blend of cajolery and deceit—for his sexual gratification. In glossing over her husband's actions and abetting his efforts to squirm away from the scrutiny and judgment they provoke, Hillary has too often lapsed into her customary hauteur and self-righteousness, and added to the pain delivered upon these women.

I'm 45 years old—not young, but hardly old, either. Yet I can vividly recall being informed by more than one schoolteacher that the reason America was a great country was that any boy, even one of the unprepossessing ones in our own classroom, could grow up to be president. It never occurred to me to think of that as an unfair supposition. Obviously, there were certain things a woman simply couldn't be: She couldn't be a king, or an astronaut, or the American president. That we could move, in the space of a few decades, from a civic life in which women's exclusion from national political office was an absolute article of faith, unthinkingly promulgated by female schoolteachers,



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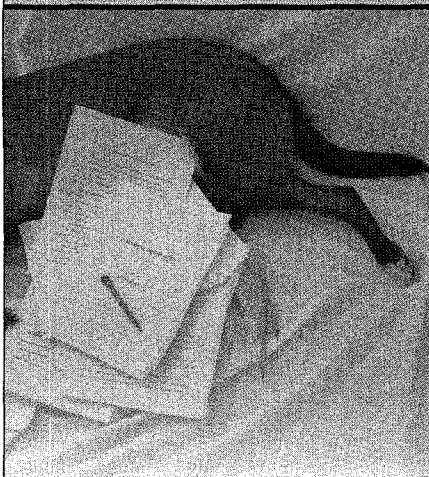
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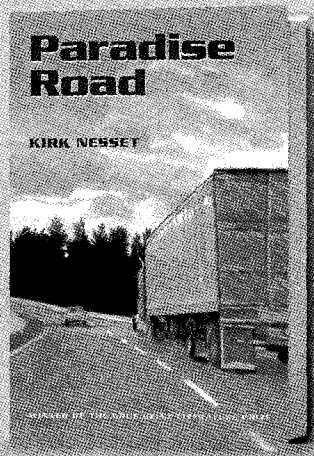
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to one in which we may very well have a female president in two years, is an astonishing and marvelous thing.

Recently, on David Letterman, Hillary said that she has been touched by the number of parents across the country who bring their young daughters out to see her, and it was an image that caught me off guard with its loveliness. Clearly, in some authentic corner of her soul, Hillary does care a great deal about girls, and clearly to her and to many women of her generation, this is almost the point of the entire campaign: to break through, to win the final battle of a war that has been so hard-fought, so grim, so difficult.

Why, then, are so many of the most liberal and educated women ambivalent about Hillary? Perhaps it's because when they get excited about the notion of a woman president, it's not because they merely want to settle an old score. It's because, to them, to imagine a superpower that is shaped not around men's values but around women's—a superpower that puts caring for the weak and the vulnerable above everything else—is to imagine a world that is much better than the current one. But because Hillary long ago attached her ideals and political destiny to Bill Clinton's, she has of necessity made herself complicit—in ways that go far beyond the traditional role of first lady and candidate's wife—in all sorts of unsavory actions, including the way he treated vulnerable women.

What remains of the old Hillary, the one I would have followed anywhere, are the worst of the traits that often mark idealists (humorlessness, sanctimoniousness) combined with the worst expediency and hypocrisy of her husband. In short, to get excited about Hillary is not to get excited about how a woman can change the world, but rather to endorse the way a certain kind of man—over time, and holding her hostage not only by her ambition but by the love she has for a child whose home she desperately didn't want to destroy—can diminish the very best of a woman. ■

Caitlin Flanagan is the author of *To Hell With All That* (2006). She is at work on *Girl Land*, a book about the emotional life of pubescent girls.

BOOKS

Saul Bellow's genius lay in combining the high and the low, the reflective and the active, the ivory tower and the ghetto.

The Great Assimilator

BY CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

Look first upon this picture, and on this ... the two photographs of Saul Bellow that adorn the initial covers of the Library of America edition of his collected works. In the first, we see a somewhat rakish fellow, sharply dressed and evidently fizzing with moxie, who meets the world with a cool and level gaze that belies the slight impression of a pool shark or racetrack con artist. In the second, and in profile, we get a survey of a sage in a more reflective pose; but this is a sage who still might utter a well-chosen wisecrack out of the side of his mouth. The antique history of the shtetl and the ghetto is inscribed in both studies of the man, but some considerable mental and physical distance has evidently been traveled in each case.

At Bellow's memorial meeting, held in the Young Men's Hebrew Association at Lexington Avenue and 92nd Street two years ago, the main speakers were Ian McEwan, Jeffrey Eugenides, Martin Amis, William Kennedy, and James Wood (now the editor of this finely produced collection). Had it not been for an especially vapid speech by some forgettable rabbi, the platform would have been exclusively composed of non-Jews, many of them non-American. How had Bellow managed to exert such an effect on writers almost half his age, from another tradition and another continent? Putting this question to the speakers later on, I received two particularly memorable responses. Ian McEwan related his impression that Bellow, alone among American writers of his generation, had seemed to assimilate the whole European classical inheritance. And Martin Amis vividly remembered something Bellow had once said to him, which is that if you



are born in the ghetto, the very conditions compel you to look skyward, and thus to hunger for the universal.

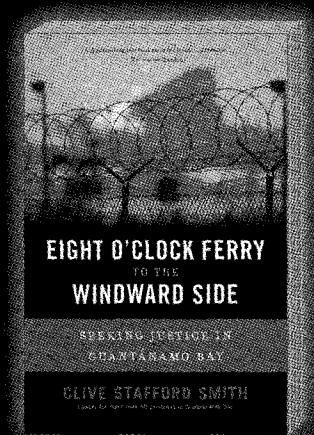
In *The Victim*, the Jewish son of an anti-gentile and ghetto-mentality storekeeper is being given a hard time by an

insecure and alcoholic WASP. "I'm a fine one to be talking about tradition, you must be saying," admits the latter:

"But still I was born into it. And try to imagine how New York affects me. Isn't it preposterous? It's really as if

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the children of Caliban were running everything. You go down in the subway and Caliban gives you two nickels for your dime. You go home and he has a candy store in the street where you were born. The old breeds are out. The streets are named after them. But what are they themselves? Just remnants."

"I see how it is; you're actually an aristocrat," said Leventhal.

"It may not strike you as it struck me," said Allbee. "But I go into the library once in a while, to look around, and last week I saw a book about Thoreau and Emerson by a man named Lipschitz ..."

"What of it?"

"A name like that?" Allbee said this with great earnestness. "After all, it seems to me that people of such background simply couldn't understand ..."

Remember that when Bellow was growing up, Lionel Trilling could be sacked from a teaching post at Columbia on the grounds that a Jew could not really appreciate English literature. Recall also the exquisite pain with which Henry James, in *The American Scene* in 1907, had registered "the whole hard glitter of Israel" on New York's Lower East Side, and especially the way in which Yiddish-speaking authors operated the "torture-rooms of the living idiom." Bellow in his time was to translate Isaac Bashevis Singer into English (and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" into Yiddish), but it mattered to him that the ghetto be transcended and that he, too, could sing America. The various means of this assertion included pyrotechnic versatility with English, a ferocious assimilation of learning, and an emphasis on the man of action as well as the man of reflection.

If you reread Bellow's fiction in this light, you will, I think, be sure to find these considerations recurring to you. As early as the text of *Dangling Man*, there are fairly effortless references to Goethe, Diderot, Alexander the Great, *Measure for Measure*, Machiavelli, Berkeley, Dr. Johnson, Joyce, Marx, and Baudelaire. The novel

contains, in parallel, a replication of Bellow's own life experience as a slum kid, as an illegal immigrant from Quebec, and as an aspirant member of the United States armed forces. A much later short story—"Something to Remember Me By"—sees a young Jewish boy being rolled by a whore and saved by the sordid denizens of a Chicago speakeasy, but depicts the kid as distressed most of all by the loss of a torn book that he had bought for a nickel. All around him are people who have become coarsened and street-smart, but this variety of common "wisdom" is to be despised as too cheaply bought.

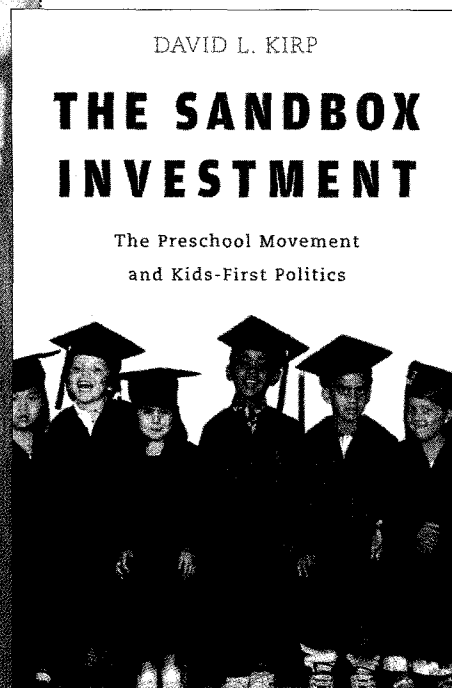
When I think of Bellow, I think not just of a man whose genius for the vernacular could seem to restate Athenian philosophy as if run through a Damon Runyon synthesizer, but of the author who came up with such graphic expressions for vulgarity and thuggery and stupidity—the debased currency of those too brutalized to have retained the capacity for wonder. "A goon's rodeo" is Augie March's description of a saturnalia of the mindless. "The moronic inferno"—apparently annexed from Wyndham Lewis—is the phrasing that occurs in *Humboldt's Gift*. "Moral buggery" is the crisp summary of New York values in *Dangling Man*. Best of all, in a confrontation between a thoughtful person and an uncivilized one that also occurs in *Humboldt's Gift*, is the dawning recognition that the latter belongs to the "mental rabble of the wisened-up world." The narrator of *Dangling Man* states it shortly:

Most serious matters are closed to the hard-boiled. They are unpracticed in introspection, and therefore badly equipped to deal with opponents whom they cannot shoot like big game or outdo in daring ... The hard-boiled are compensated for their silence: they fly planes or fight bulls or catch tarpon, whereas I rarely leave my room.

Yet Bellow by no means dismisses the Hemingway style as easily as that.

**NOVELS
1944–1953:**
Dangling Man,
The Victim,
*The Adventures
of Augie March*

**NOVELS
1956–1964:**
Seize the Day,
*Henderson the Rain
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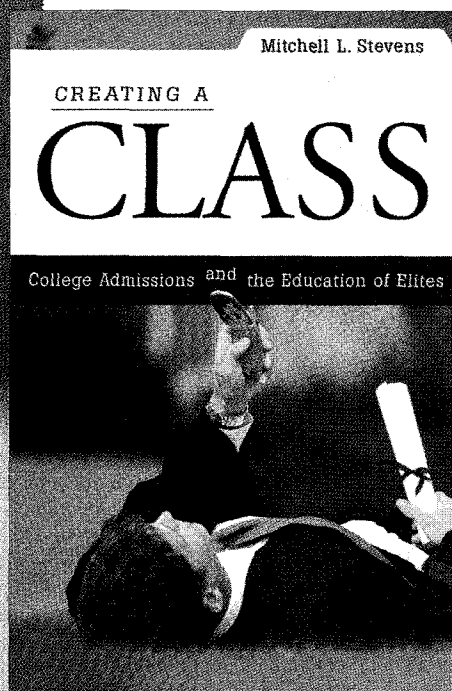
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Several of his heroes and protagonists—including the thick-necked Henderson, his only non-Jewish central character—rise above the sickly and the merely bookish. They tackle lions and, in the case of Augie March, a truly fearsome eagle. They mix it up with revolutionaries and bandits and hard-core criminals. Commenting on Socrates' famous dictum about the worthlessness of the unexamined life, the late Kurt Vonnegut once inquired: "What if the examined life turns out to be a clunker as well?" Bellow would have seen, and indeed did see, the force of this question. Like Lambert Strether's in *The Ambassadors*, his provisional answer seems to have been: "Live all you can; it's a mistake not to." And

Dangling Man, the narrator hears of a college friend's death in the war and diagnoses it as an indirect act of will:

I always suspected of him that he had in some fashion discovered there were some ways in which to be human was to be unutterably dismal, and that all his life was given over to avoiding those ways.

Whereas in *The Adventures of Augie March*, the hero signs up for the same combat and, reflecting on what it does for his sex life, asks, "What use was war without also love?" Yiddishism or no Yiddishism, this must count as one of the most affirmative and masculine sentences ever set down.

who makes splendid use of his secondhand English when addressing his massive and worried American guest as follows:

"Yet you are right for the long run, and good exchanged for evil truly is the answer. I also subscribe, but it appears a long way off, for the human species as a whole. Perhaps I am not the one to make a prediction, Sungo, but I think the noble will have its turn in the world."

Perhaps the best illustration of nobility that Bellow offers is Augie March's brief glimpse of Trotsky in Mexico, from which he receives a strong impression of "deep-water greatness" and an ability to steer by the brightest stars. Bellow himself had arrived in Mexico in 1940, just too late to see Trotsky, who had been murdered by a hireling assassin the morning they were meant to meet. Like Henderson, Trotsky was a man upon whom life had "decided to use strong measures." The founder of the Red Army was also the author of *Literature and Revolution* and a co-author of *Manifesto for an Independent Revolutionary Art*. In his own person he united the Jew, the cosmopolitan, the man of ideas, and the man of action. And the speed with which Bellow learned from the experience of Trotsky's murder is a theme in several of his fictions. In *Dangling Man*, Joseph astonishes his friend Myron by the amount he can deduce from the simple fact that a former "comrade" will no longer speak to him in public. "Oh, Joseph," exclaims Myron, as if reproving exaggeration; but Joseph isn't merely piqued in the sense of personal offense:

"No, really, listen to me. Forbid one man to talk to another, forbid him to communicate with someone else, and you've forbidden him to think, because, as a great many writers will tell you, thought is a kind of communication. And his party doesn't want him to think, but to follow its discipline. So there you are ... When a man obeys an order like that he's helping to abolish freedom and begin tyranny."

This "insolence," Joseph concluded, "figured the whole betrayal of an undertaking to which I had once devoted

FROM THE ARCHIVE

ROBERT FROST

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth ...

"The Road Not Taken," August 1915

the tough-guy Henderson, so gross and physical and intrepid (and so inarticulate when he speaks, yet so full of reflective capacity when he thinks), cannot repress his wonder when flying: He keeps pointing out that his is the first generation to have seen the clouds from above as well as below:

"What a privilege! First people dreamed upward. Now they dream both upward and downward. This is bound to change something, somewhere."

Erich Fromm once gave a course at the New School on "the struggle against pointlessness," and one wonders whether Bellow heard of, or took, this class. Pervasive in his work is a sense of the awful trap posed by aimlessness and its cousins, impotence and the death wish. In

Against pointlessness and futility, Bellow strove to counterpose what Augie calls "the universal eligibility to be noble"—the battle to overcome not just ghetto conditions but also ghetto psychoses. Such yearning ambition, as Bellow knew, can be a torment to those who are not innately noble to begin with. Even Wilhelm, the desperate and perspiring arriviste in *Seize the Day*, has a touch of higher aspiration amid his death-of-a-salesman panics, and he finds snatches of English lyric poetry coming back to him at improbable moments. And Allbee, the drunken anti-Semite in *The Victim*, the man who says that "evil is as real as sunshine," chooses to speak loftily about his "honor" when he comes to oppress and exhaust Asa Leventhal. In all this, the great precursor is the strongly drawn King Dahfu in *Henderson the Rain King*,

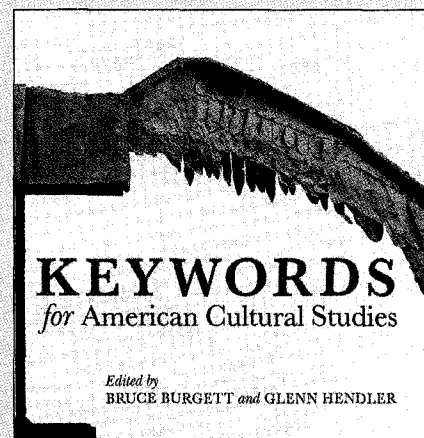
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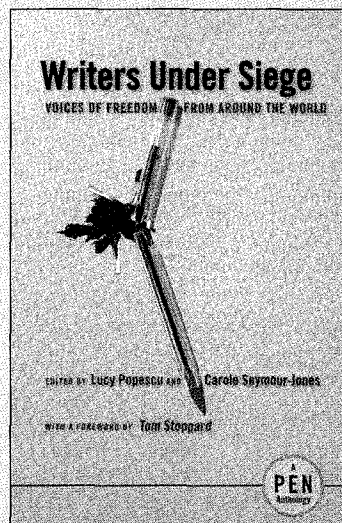
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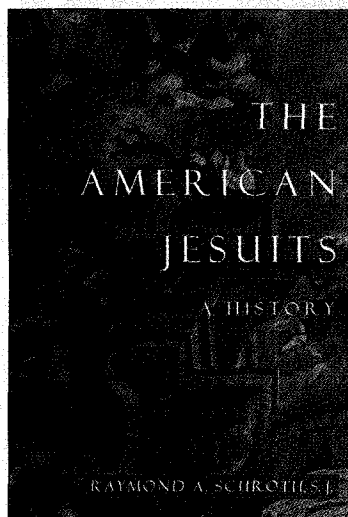


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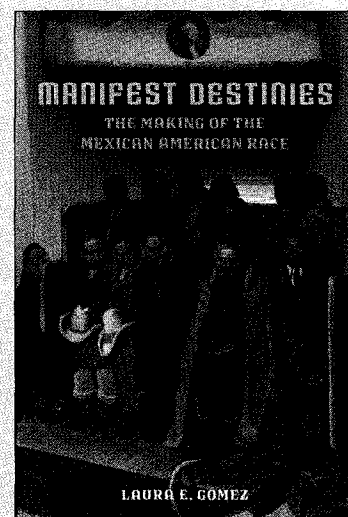
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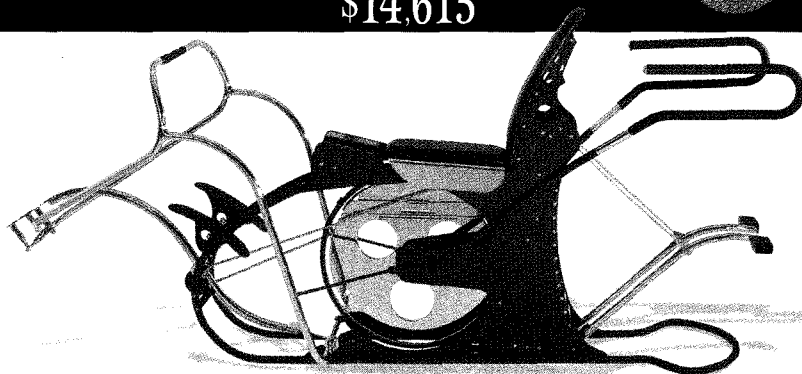
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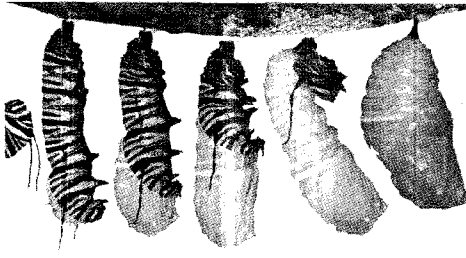
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myself," and who is to say that Bellow selected the wrong microcosm of *trahison*? From a detail of political etiquette, he could infer the incipient mentality of the totalitarian. His life as a public intellectual is sometimes held to have followed a familiar arc or trajectory: that from quasi-Trotskyist to full-blown "neo-con," and of course it is true that the earlier novels contain portraits of members of the *Partisan Review* group, from Delmore Schwartz to Dwight Macdonald, whereas the final novel, *Ravelstein*, features an affectionate portrayal of Allan Bloom (whose *Closing of the American Mind* Bellow had helped make into a best seller), and even of Paul Wolfowitz during the intra-Washington struggle over the Gulf War, in 1991.

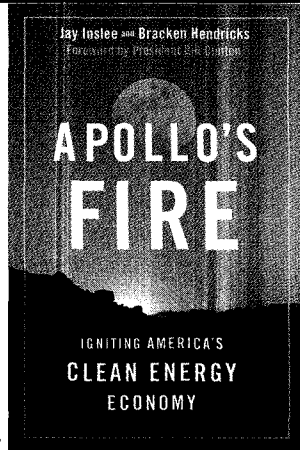
But Bellow's political evolution was by no means an uncomplicated or predictable one. He had been loosely associated with the dynamic ex-Trotskyist Max Schachtman (a man, incidentally, who is much more the founder of neoconservatism than Leo Strauss). Bellow's first published short story, a fiercely polemical reply to Sinclair Lewis's novel *It Can't Happen Here* that was no less polemically titled "The Hell It Can't," was obviously written under the influence of the Trotskyist youth movement. As late as the 1990s, Bellow eulogized Schachtman's widow, Yetta Barshevsky, recalling her fiery anti-Stalinism with affection. And until quite late in the day, his name appeared on the editorial masthead of Julius Jacobson's *New Politics*, an essentially post-Schachtmanite journal of democratic socialism.

Of the single occasion when I met Bellow properly, Martin Amis has given a brilliantly scandalized account in his memoir, *Experience*. Actually, the evening wasn't as rough as all that. Bellow read to us from some fascinating old correspondence with John Berryman. He recalled the occasion when he had been denied a job at *Time* magazine by no less a person than Whittaker Chambers for giving the wrong answer to a question about William Wordsworth (the episode is loosely fictionalized in *The Victim*). When



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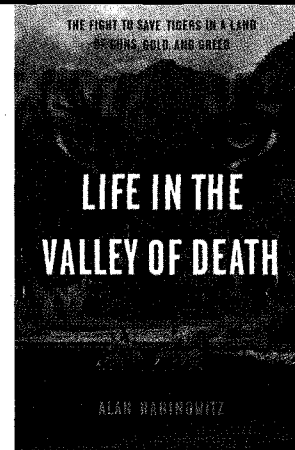


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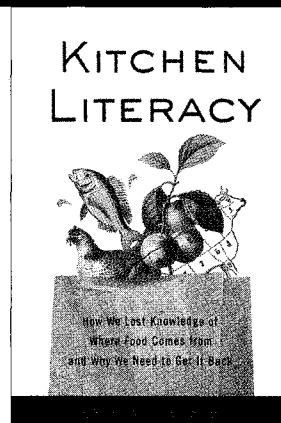
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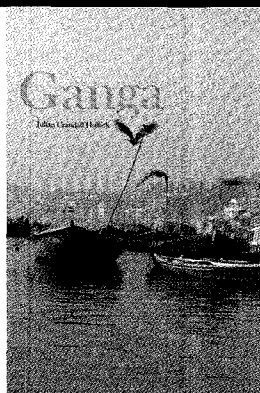
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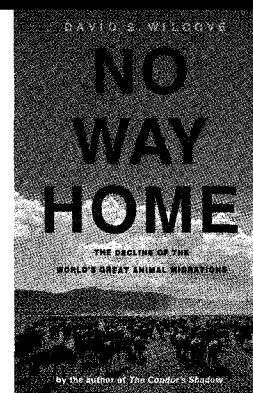


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asked his opinion, Bellow had said that he thought of Wordsworth as a Romantic poet, and then been rudely turned away. He wondered aloud what he ought to have said instead, and I daringly suggested that the answer was an easy one: Chambers wanted him to say that Wordsworth was a former revolutionary and republican poet who saw the error of his ways and became a counterrevolutionary

work *To Jerusalem and Back* will be compelled to notice that the Arab inhabitants of the holy city are as nearly invisible and alien as their equivalents in Oran in Camus' *La Peste*. At any event, we ended up having a strong disagreement about the Palestinians in general, and the work of Edward Said in particular. I have several times devoutly wished that we could have had this discussion again.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

ROBERT PINSKY

Part of our peculiar claim to greatness as a nation rests on the fact that we have done without many elements that might be thought of as the marks of a great people, among them a myth of origin. Americans have been suckled by no wolf, sired by no Trojan fleeing Troy; they are not descended from the sun or from dragon's teeth sown in the earth, not chosen by a god or descended from Olympian trysts with mortal maidens, not descended from any totem animal or enchanted soil or ancient race. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, passionately determined that the young American nation develop a distinct culture for its people, wrote "Paul Revere's Ride" in a conscious effort to supply such a myth—and with some success. I can testify that many Americans, including Senator Edward Kennedy, have much of the poem by heart.

"Poetry and American Memory," October 1999

and a monarchist. This seemed to satisfy and amuse Bellow, who then wondered aloud what his writing life would have been like if he had secured that safe billet at *Time*.

So all was going fairly smoothly, except that on the reading table, like a revolver in a Chekhov play, there lay a loaded copy of *Commentary*. It soon became apparent that Bellow really had moved to the right, without losing his taste for Talmudic and *trotskisant* dialectic, and that in his mind there was a strong connection between the decay of American cities and campuses, and wider questions of ideological promiscuity. I do not think I am wrong in guessing that he regarded the battle in the Middle East as something of an allegory of the distraught state of black-white (and black-Jewish) relations in his beloved Chicago. Anyone who has read his nonfiction

The thread in the labyrinth of Bellow's politics has undoubtedly something to do with the "ghetto" also, and with a certain awkward possessiveness about the employment of that same pejorative. In a revealing moment in *Ravelstein*, the hero objects to the commonplace use of the term as customarily applied to black American life:

"Ghetto nothing!" Ravelstein said. "Ghetto Jews had highly developed feelings, civilized nerves—thousands of years of training. They had communities and laws. 'Ghetto' is an ignorant newspaper term. It's not a ghetto that they come from, it's a noisy, pointless, nihilistic turmoil."

So, perhaps paradoxically, Bellow echoes a defensive and even admiring attitude to the very place from which he wished to escape. This is almost conservatism defined. One can locate the

same trope as early as *Dangling Man*, where the boy recalling the horrors of slum life remembers "a man rearing over someone on a bed, and, on another occasion, a Negro with a blond woman on his lap." And the underage black boy who transmits AIDS to Ravelstein (who himself is fatally attracted to the very thing that he supposedly most despises), was in early drafts given the same name as *Augie March's* only black character. In *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, the eponymous figure is haunted by a large "Negro" who stops him in the street and flaunts a massive penis in his face. In *The Dean's December*, black crime and big-city corruption have become hard to distinguish in Bellow's mind; he was later to manifest alarm and disgust when a black demagogue in Chicago accused Jewish doctors of spreading the AIDS virus. I don't want to make any insinuation here, but it's clear that Bellow had concluded that one of the fondest hopes of the democratic left—that of a black-Jewish alliance—had become a thing of the past: another slightly sappy project of what in a more genial and witty moment he had called "the Good Intentions Paving Company."

However, he never quite succumbed to the affectless cynicism that he had always despised. His famously provocative 1988 question, "Who is the Tolstoy of the Zulus? The Proust of the Papuans?," asked in the context of a defense of Bloom, seemed to many people to contradict the generosity of what he had offered about Africa in *Henderson*, and evidently must have struck Bellow himself in the same light, since six years later he wrote a much-less-noticed essay in praise of the novel of Zululand *Chaka*, by Thomas Mofolo. Life and politics might have had souring results, and so might personal experience, but to the end, he put his money on the life-affirming and on the will to live (as Henderson's understanding of the benediction *grun-tu-molani* loosely translates), and he could never quite abandon his faith in that crucial eligibility to be noble. ▀

Christopher Hitchens is an *Atlantic* contributing editor and a *Vanity Fair* columnist.

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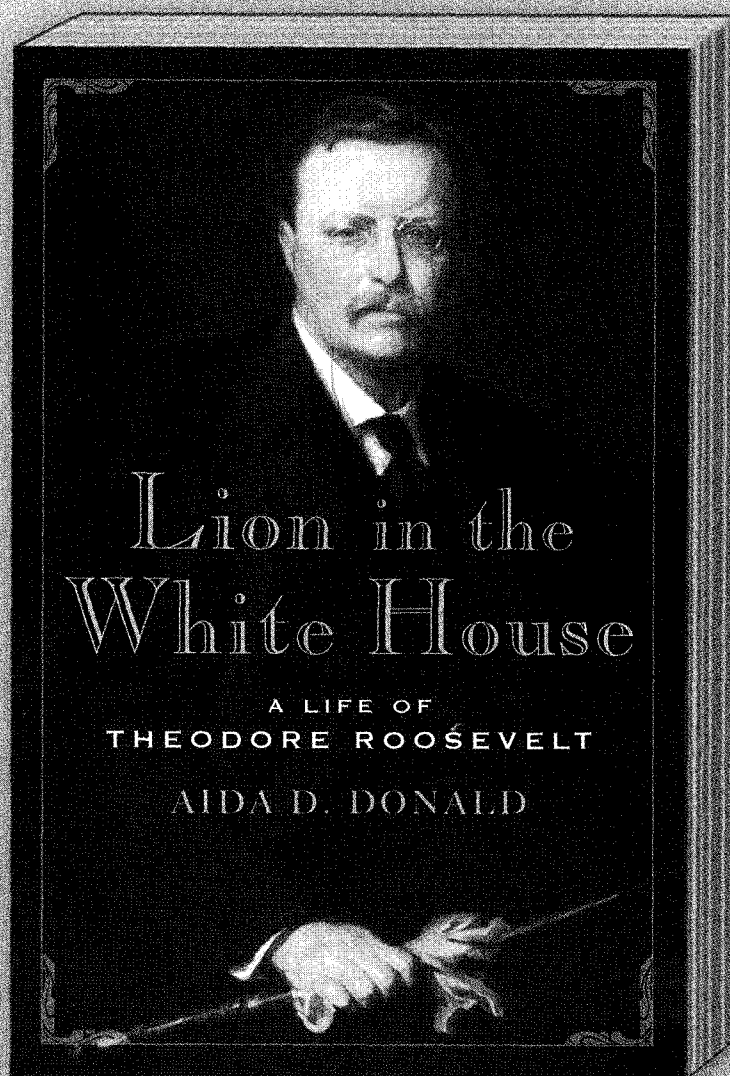
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COVER to COVER

FICTION

The Air We Breathe

by Andrea Barrett (Norton)

Near the end of this surprisingly suspenseful novel, Barrett quotes from a chemistry textbook: "Every chemical ... reaction ... can only take place under a condition of most intimate and close contact of the re-acting substances." Setting her story in a public sanatorium in the Adirondacks in 1916, she puts her characters—mostly working-class immigrants well educated in their native countries—into just such an intimate situation, ripe for reactions. They room together, eat together, spend long hours taking their rest cures side by side, in air charged with turbulent national and world events: labor organizing, the Great War, and rising nationalism. (Comparisons to *The Magic Mountain* are inevitable.) Feelings of frustration, betrayal, and unrequited love drive the action, but these people have intellectual, as well as emotional, obsessions. Here, as in several of her other works of fiction, including the National Book Award-winning *Ship Fever*, Barrett enriches her story with science—in this case, paleontology, organic chemistry, relativity, and, most interestingly, radiology. In fact, her style, always stylish and exact, is at its most compelling when she's describing her characters' engagement in their scientific studies.

Run

by Ann Patchett (HarperCollins)

Patchett's novels are constructed with precision, and her characters, while disparate at the outset, end up bound tightly together. In this gracefully executed book, she starts with an Irish family, adds two adopted African American sons, and then, on a snowy night in Boston, tosses in an 11-year-old girl and her mother, who turns out to

be ... well, let's not spoil the excellent plot. Patchett's themes are weighty, and the emotional connections she builds among her exceedingly well-developed characters are powerful, yet the read is effortless.

BIOGRAPHY and MEMOIR

La Nilsson: My Life in Opera

by Birgit Nilsson (Northeastern)

First published in Nilsson's native Sweden in 1995, a decade before her death, the celebrated soprano's autobiography was intensely acclaimed after its 1997 translation into German. Finally translated into English from that edition, it's worth the wait. Despite the double translation, this book still vibrates with Nilsson's voice. Although copious photographs show her looking like a diva from central casting, her authorial persona is the opposite of what you'd expect: Warm, down-to-earth, joshing, never afraid to poke fun at herself, Nilsson is a delightful writer. *La Nilsson*, a welcome antidote to such attention-grabbing memoirs as fellow diva Régine Crespin's, shows a star who knew how to keep drama where it belonged: onstage.

Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography

by Gail Levin (Rizzoli)

First published in 1995, this painstakingly detailed biography of the hard-wearing American master painter was "updated and expanded" in time for the blockbuster Hopper exhibition. Among the new materials are nearly 100 illustrations—most of them small, decently colored reproductions of Hopper's now-nostalgically haunting paintings—and 40-odd pages of text dealing with Hopper's persistence in American visual arts, including cinema. Most interesting, however, is Levin's defense of her heavy reliance on the private diaries of the artist's wife and collaborator of more than

40 years, Josephine Nivison Hopper—a woman whose considerable talent and insightful voice her husband frequently attempted to suppress. In the same spirit, the Whitney destroyed most of her paintings soon after it received the great Hopper bequest, in 1968, but her diaries survived and are largely responsible for making this one of the best biographies of any American artist.

Herbert Spencer and the Invention of Modern Life

by Mark Francis (Cornell)

Those of us who have studied 19th-century history, even casually, know something about the social philosopher Herbert Spencer. And much of what we think we know is wrong. The irony, according to Francis, is that this thinker who attempted to bridge various spheres of knowledge in his life's work has been broken up into so many parts, seemingly unrelated, and each of them finally misleading. In this stunning intellectual biography, Francis provides a compelling portrait of the man and the work, by interpreting the writings within the complicated contexts of the technical debates of Spencer's time. Tortured, full of self-doubts and admitted inadequacies, Spencer was an enormously subtle and complex thinker, empathetic and ironic in his self-deprecating dealings with the world. Still, his writings affected just about every area of modern intellectual life: ethics, metaphysics, sociology, anthropology, political theory, philosophy, and psychology.

Being Shelley:

The Poet's Search for Himself

by Ann Wroe (Pantheon)

Visionary poets like Shelley seem to inspire visionary critics like Wroe, who here puts aside chronology for something more daring. She describes Shelley's search for himself metaphorically, as a journey through the Greek elements,

beginning with earth (he had a horror of dirt), moving on to water and air, and ending in the pure fire of the poetic imagination. This sounds abstruse, but it's all anchored gracefully in biographical and textual detail—especially from material in Shelley's notebooks.

Harold Robbins:

The Man Who Invented Sex

by Andrew Wilson (Bloomsbury)

Does life imitate art, or is it the other way around? Few have confused the age-old question as thoroughly as Robbins, the "godfather of the airport novel." Over the course of multiple marriages and a 50-year career, he sold some 750 million copies of his tawdry tomes—salacious, eminently readable stories of greed, sex, and moral compromise—and used the substantial means that ensued to largely decadent ends: drinks, drugs, boats, broads. Robbins met with early success as a grocery clerk (he claimed to have made his first million by age 20), lost his fortune, became a different sort of clerk at Universal Pictures, and worked as a bookkeeper before getting his break as a writer. He cited John Steinbeck and John Dos Passos as influences, counted James Baldwin and Pablo Picasso among his friends, and earned praise from the likes of Camille Paglia. The dissonance here is thus daunting and dizzying, and making sense of it no small task. Happily, the British journalist Wilson rises to the challenge: His account is appropriately chatty, but also crisp, elegant, and thorough—a mass-market tale told in near-literary terms. Robbins is brought to life, and would surely himself have turned page after page.

HISTORY



Lenin's Private War:

The Voyage of the Philosophy Steamer and the Exile of the Intelligentsia

by Lesley Chamberlain (St. Martin's)

In 1919, while Lenin was engaged in the wholesale slaughter of the Russian grand dukes, Maxim Gorky pleaded with the Soviet leader to spare the life of one, Nicholas Mikhailovich, whose work as a historian he admired—to which Lenin supposedly replied, "The revolution has no need for historians." This latest book from Chamberlain, that superb chronicler of all things Russian,

demonstrates the extent of Lenin's determination to rid his newly created state of its intellectual crème de la crème, whom he sent packing on two ships in the autumn of 1922. As always, Chamberlain is that rare cicerone for the reader, displaying learning, empathy, and deep understanding on every page.

That Neutral Island

by Clair Wills (Harvard)

Ireland's determined neutrality in the Second World War was such a sore point for Britain that Churchill couldn't restrain himself—even in 1945, in the hour of triumphant victory—from lashing out at that nation for the lives it had cost. Perhaps Irish Prime Minister Eamon de Valera's recent condolence visit to the German diplomatic representative in Dublin on Hitler's death had enraged him anew. But as Wills shows in her penetrating account of why and how Ireland stayed neutral while the global conflict literally washed up on its shores, more than passionate nationalist and anti-British feelings were at work in that policy. This far-ranging book not only explores the strategic and political reasoning behind Irish neutrality, which had almost unanimous domestic support, but draws on such resident chroniclers as Elizabeth Bowen, Louis MacNeice, and John Betjeman to paint a detailed picture of how life was lived on this island of light surrounded by a blacked-out world.

My Colombian War: A Journey Through the Country I Left Behind

by Silvana Paternostro (Henry Holt)

A nation's narrative rendered through a personal prism, this evocative work succeeds where many similar efforts fail. The secret? Paternostro herself, a deservedly celebrated journalist, able to deftly interweave past and present and write with a compassion that resists pathos. A child of relative privilege, she left a violently changing Colombia for the States at age 15; decades later she returned as a reporter, and what follows is revelatory. Wrenching interviews with today's Colombians, unflinching descriptions of the horrors wrought by drug cartels and paramilitary groups, and unusual details keenly conveyed amount to a moving, highly memorable take on how a country lost its moorings.

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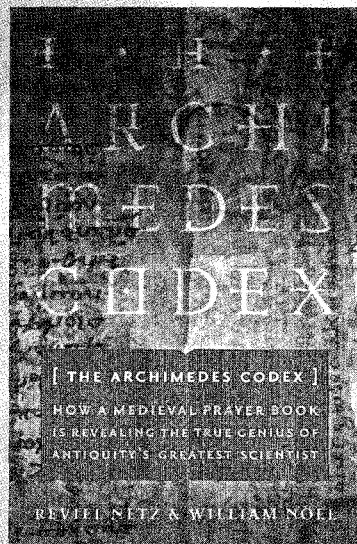
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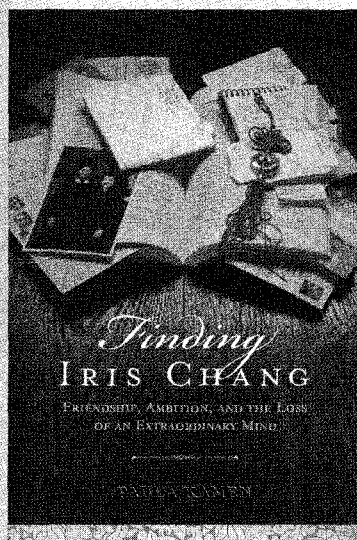
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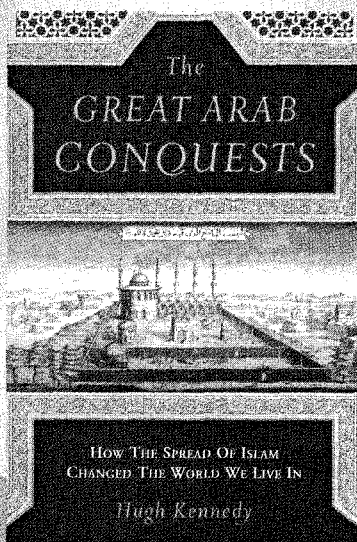


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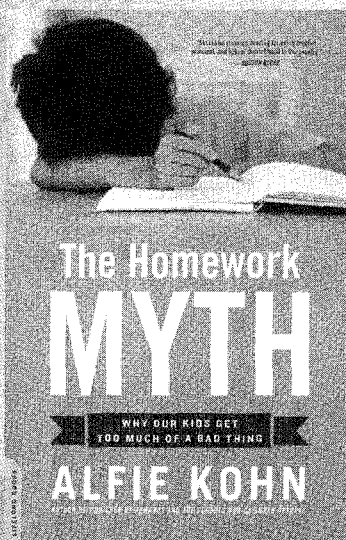
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THE VIEW FROM THE STERN
of the *American Queen*, the
largest steamboat ever built

TRAVELS

Mint juleps and Magic Fingers on the Mississippi

In Twain's Wake

BY WAYNE CURTIS

In *Life on the Mississippi*, Mark Twain wrote:

Mississippi steamboating was born about 1812. At the end of thirty years, it had grown to mighty proportions; and in less than thirty more, it was dead! A strangely short life for so majestic a creature.

Twain, it turns out, had exaggerated steamboating's demise. Steam-driven ships persisted for years, and even today a tiny fleet plies the river, catering to nostalgics, history buffs, collectors of cruise experiences, and people who wear T-shirts that read "I'M RETIRED. GO AROUND ME."

I'd wanted to take a trip on the Mississippi ever since reading Twain in high

school—not a very original thought, I admit, and one easily ignored for decades, right up until last year, when I moved to New Orleans and realized I knew nearly nothing about the river. So one afternoon this past May, I headed to the wharf behind the convention center, bags in hand, and boarded the *American Queen* for Memphis, some 640 river miles and seven days north.

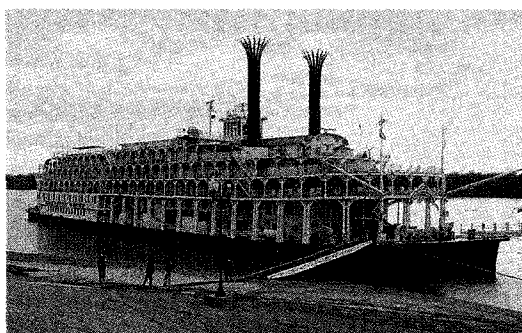
The *American Queen* was launched in 1995 and holds more than 400 passengers. At 418 feet long, it's the largest steamboat ever built. It has a bright-red wooden stern wheel that looks ornamental, like those waterwheels in front of some country-themed restaurants.

But this wheel actually propels the ship, which is actually powered by tandem steam engines dating from 1932 and salvaged from an earlier vessel. (In other respects, the *American Queen* is reassuringly modern, with devices like radar, bow thrusters, and diesel-electric Z-drives. It's also much safer than the first generation of steamboats, whose boilers had a propensity to suddenly blow up, "sending a score or two of parboiled passengers to an inconvenient altitude," as one writer put it in 1833.)

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visit www.theatlantic.com/mississippi.

I booked the cheapest inside state-room available—the cruise equivalent of steerage. My room was roughly 10 by 10 and had no windows. It did have an air-conditioning vent that vented with enviable brio. Overall, the room was comfortable and well kept, like the den of an uncommonly tidy hedgehog.

Still, I spent almost all my waking hours in the public spaces, which are large, elaborate, and numerous. More than a century ago, Twain wrote that to step aboard a steamship was to enter “a new and marvellous world ... a bewildering and soul-satisfying spectacle!” It still



THE TRAVEL ADVISORY

The Majestic America Line operates three ships on the Mississippi: the *American Queen* (pictured above), the *Mississippi Queen*, and the *Delta Queen*. Destinations range from New Orleans to St. Paul; some cruises also wend up the Ohio River to Cincinnati and Pittsburgh.

Rates vary widely according to the type of cabin and the season. Fares on the *American Queen* between New Orleans and Memphis, for example, range from about \$900 to \$2,300 per person (based on double occupancy), including meals. Liquor, wine, and some guided shore excursions are extra. Seven-night summer cruises from St. Louis to St. Paul are \$1,500 to \$2,300 per person. A 14-day cruise from New Orleans to Pittsburgh aboard the historic *Delta Queen* (built in 1926) runs \$4,000 to \$6,200 per person.

For further information on cruising the Mississippi, visit www.majesticamericaline.com, or call 800-434-1232.

is. The *American Queen* is stacked like a five-layer wedding cake and done up in the fussy high-Victorian style favored by the sort of bed-and-breakfasts I usually avoid. But here the furnishings seemed wholly appropriate. The Mark Twain Gallery, in the middle of the second deck, had a glossy wooden floor, wingback chairs, Tiffany-style lamps, and ship models in glass cases. On the same level, on the port side toward the bow, was the Ladies' Parlor, which had live parakeets, marble busts of minor deities, floral wallpaper, and that ornately carved walnut furniture that's no more appealing to look at than it is to sit on. Across the way, on the starboard side, was the Gentlemen's Card Room. This was dark and very manly, and had a mounted boar's head on one wall and a stuffed bear in a corner. Also featured was a rack of truncheon-like exercise clubs, which made me a little sad that I had forgotten to bring my one-piece striped gym outfit and handlebar mustache for morning calisthenics.

The options higher up were equally inviting, with both open and covered decks and a postage-stamp-sized swimming pool on the topmost level. Here you could get the full effect of the calliope, an old-fashioned steam organ that let loose with melodious eructations whenever the ship left port. Its sound was exactly the opposite of a pipe organ's: Where the latter rouses one with deep bass notes, the calliope thrills with piercingly high ones. It is, however, a thrill I believe best experienced only once.

The first steamships distorted time and space along the Mississippi. A journey that had taken rivermen several months, drifting on cargo-laden flatboats down the river to New Orleans and returning home by foot, was compressed into a few weeks. Upriver ports were suddenly accessible from downriver, and goods could travel two ways.

Modern steamships also distort time and space along the river, but contrarily—making distances seem longer and time more sluggish. The days I spent on the boat unfolded with an agreeable languor. I'd awaken most mornings to general

quiet, the engines silenced and the ship tethered to a riverbank somewhere. For all its bulk, the *American Queen* doesn't need much in the way of infrastructure to come calling—just a place to tie up and a spot to swing out the long gangway. In seven days, we stopped at six towns in four states. Bus tours were offered at each, but I did my exploring on foot; clambering onto a bus and viewing the countryside through tinted glass seemed counter to the spirit of steamship travel.

The first morning, I emerged from my refrigerated burrow to find the air thick and heavy and sweet smelling. From the third deck, I could see over the grassy levee to Oak Alley, a Louisiana sugar plantation at the end of a corridor of 300-year-old live oaks, whose limbs could span a sports arena. I wandered over and joined an early tour, led by a hoopskirted guide who spoke in that singsong monotone used to hypnotize tourists and make them think that tarnished table settings are interesting. The house was grand, but not nearly as grand as the oaks. Near the back door I found a mint-julep stand, where a very serviceable cocktail could be bought, even at that early hour, and enjoyed under the oaks. (One advantage of a stateroom with no window is that it's much easier to recalibrate your biological clock.)

The subsequent days unfolded pretty much in this manner: Mornings were given to the exploration of one town or another; then the whistle would blow, the calliope would begin its fiendish racket, and the ship would resume its slow churn up the river. Afternoons and evenings were spent eating, attending history lectures, and sitting in deck chairs, where the vibration from the engine created a Magic Fingers effect; inevitably, I would find myself in a row of dozing passengers, our heads secured to our chests with great hawsers of drool.

The second morning, still in Louisiana, I walked a mile from the river into St. Francisville, an unsettlingly bucolic village of shops selling antiques and new things that looked antique, and tidy homes, many of which had statues of Saint Francis tucked into their yards.

AP PHOTO/DETA DEMOCRAT TIMES/BILL JOHNSON

Another day, in Natchez, Mississippi, I watched a Memorial Day parade that consisted almost exclusively of African American veterans and spectators—someone onboard later explained that this holiday, formerly called Decoration Day to commemorate the Union dead, is still considered an impolite reminder of times past, and not everyone participates. In stately Vicksburg, Mississippi, I took a historical walking tour and heard about life in the intricate caves dug during the 47-day Union siege, when the town was dubbed “Prairie Dog Village.” At the antebellum courthouse, now a local history museum, I learned that the Union flag was run up the flagpole on July 4, 1863, signaling the town’s surrender and ruining another perfectly good holiday: The Fourth of July hasn’t really been celebrated in Vicksburg since.

After one full day spent chugging up the river, which triggered a fiercer-than-usual competition for deck chairs, we put in at Helena, Arkansas. Twain wrote that he’d heard it was a “hell of a place,” adding that this description “was photographic for exactness.” But this turned out to be my favorite stop. Helena is like a 45-rpm record with something predictable and uninteresting on one side, and unexpected and fascinating on the other. The predictable part is the town itself—a long main street lined with vacant and underused storefronts displaying the weary ennui of a place that commerce long ago passed by. Even the mortar between the bricks seems to be giving up and heading elsewhere.

On the flip side is Helena’s historical role as a hub of Mississippi Delta blues. I stopped by the Delta Cultural Center and chatted with “Sunshine” Sonny Payne, who’s been hosting the *King Biscuit Time* blues radio show for 56 years. At the Malco Theater, I heard James “Super Chikan” Johnson put on a terrific show using handmade guitars. At Bubba’s Blues Corner record shop, I rooted through acres of vintage vinyl, and the owner, Bubba Sullivan, took me outside to point out the curtained windows of a former nightclub where Robert Johnson used to play and an auditorium where

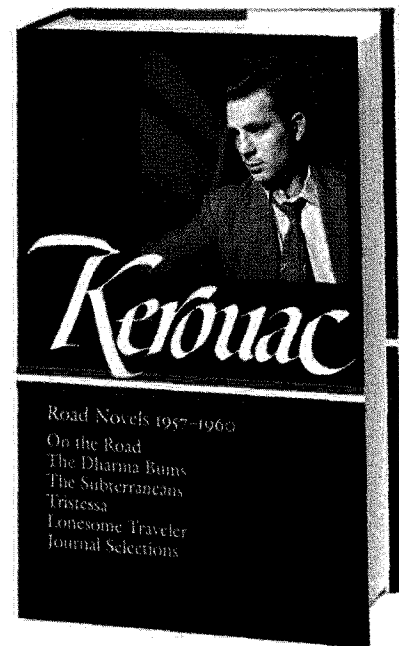
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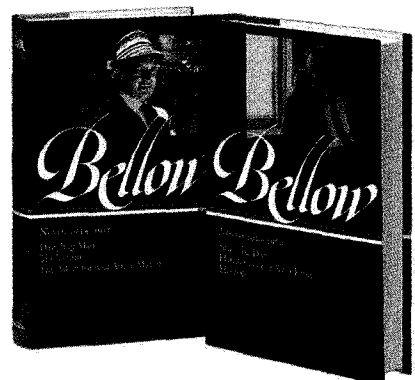
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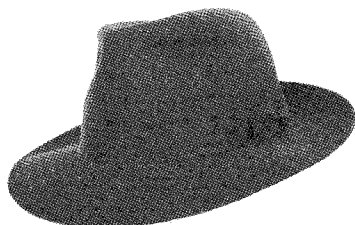
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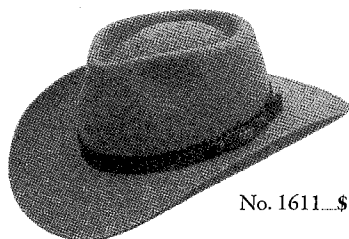


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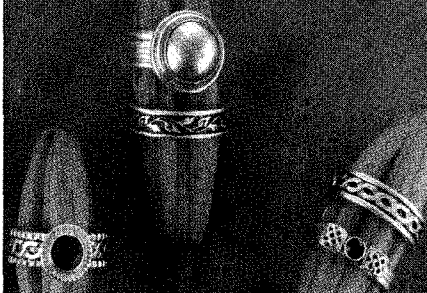
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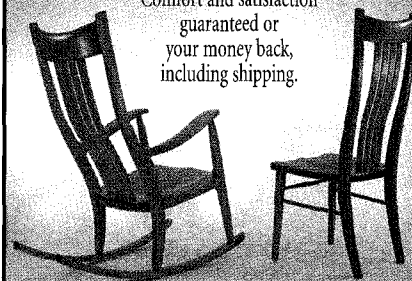
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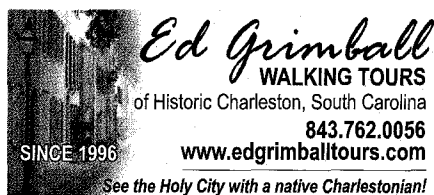
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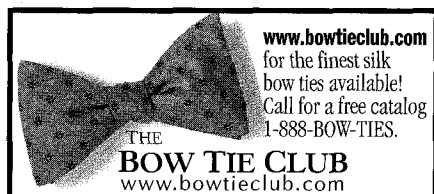


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Elvis once set local teenagers swooning. This moribund town is happily occupied by a host of spirits.

Back on the ship for our last night on the river, I headed to the Front Porch, a covered deck that dominated the bow and was arrayed with an arc of white porch rockers. The best time here was around eight each evening, when half the passengers were seated for dinner and the other half were in the rococo Grand Saloon watching a revue of popular song, staged amid flouncy petticoats and rakishly angled top hats.

As usual, I had the porch to myself and could just sit and watch the riverbank unspool. The single biggest surprise of the trip, for me, was how utterly empty the landscape is north of Baton Rouge. At times, the shores felt lonely enough that we might have been ascending a river in the Canadian wilds.

The night grew darker, and the captain fired up a massive spotlight, sending upriver a great silver cylinder that glittered with the confetti of confused insects. From the dark void ahead of us, rubies and emeralds came sparkling back off the reflectors on the navigational buoys. A full moon had risen over the east bank, and it moved slowly from one bracketed porch column to another, the ship serving as a sort of Victorian Stonehenge to mark the loopy curves of the river.

Around midnight, an apricot-colored dome of light over Memphis came into view. New Orleans was historically the center of the river's trade, but no longer. Today, Memphis—about a third of the way from the river's mouth to its source—has at least twice the population of New Orleans. It's also the home of FedEx, whose purple-and-orange cargo jets have arguably replaced the steamship as the keystone of modern commerce.

Off on the northern horizon, arriving and departing planes circled the urban glow like fireflies around a campfire. The view was perhaps not as romantic as that of the ornate crowns of steamship smokestacks bobbing along the wharves of old New Orleans. But it was lovely all the same. ▀

Wayne Curtis is a frequent contributor to *The Atlantic*.

FOOD

A cult destination in London has revolutionized cheesemaking, winning converts as far afield as Vermont.

The Art of Aging Well

BY CORBY KUMMER

Great cheese is always a collaboration. So I thought at the opening-night tasting at the annual conference of the American Cheese Society in Burlington, Vermont. In 1996, Allison Hooper, the society's president, whose Vermont Butter & Cheese makes famous crème fraîche and marvelous butter, called Vermont the "Napa Valley of cheese." At the time, it was an outlandish claim: When she first set up shop, as she recounts in her introduction to the new *Atlas of American Artisan Cheese*, "if it wasn't cheddar, it wasn't a business." Now it is hard to dispute.

Ten years ago at an American Cheese Society conference in Madison, Wisconsin, the feeling was intimate, and many of the cheesemakers looked like the ex-hippies they proudly were. This year the sessions on making and marketing cheeses, held in ballrooms at a Sheraton conference center, were overflowing with people looking more like well-heeled retirees who thought cheese might be easier to get into than wine.

Conference attendees nearly filled the stupendously large and equally beautiful building where the opening-night tasting was held: the Shelburne Farms breeding barn, for nearly 50 years the largest open-span timber structure in America (it was built in 1891 with Vanderbilt money). The enlightened agricultural center created by the family in order to keep the estate whole produces a highly regarded cheddar. I was struck by the quality of most of the cheeses being sampled, all of them from Vermont, and was particularly taken with three aged goat cheeses from Twig Farm that I, a dedicated goat-avoider, couldn't stop eating.



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The story of the attractive young couple that makes them, Michael and Emily Lee, is par for the Vermont course. They met at Hampshire College as art students; after several years as a bike messenger, Michael got a job at Formaggio Kitchen, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Emily got one with an international publisher. Three years ago, they decided to buy a farm in Vermont and make cheese.

Ihsan and Valerie Gurdal, the owners, were among the first American cheesemongers to install a ripening cave (actually, a humidified room in the basement), and they encouraged and guided the Lees at every step. At Formaggio, Michael had come to understand the central role that thoughtful aging plays in bringing cheeses to their fullest expression; today Twig Farm's aging makes the difference between a perfectly good cheese and an exceptional one.

The cheeses I tasted in the awe-inspiring barn crystallized my thoughts on what makes cheese become great: constant communication between cheesemaker and cheesemonger, and very careful attention to *affinage*, the art of tending cheese as it ages. I came to the conference with the taste of a lovely new English cheese fresh in my mind. It was the result of just that kind of collaboration.

Borough Market is the thriving heart of the food scene in London, a city that has taken to the buy-local mantra with an enthusiasm rivaled only by that of—well, Vermont. Cheese lovers board the Tube for London Bridge to visit the large headquarters of Neal's Yard Dairy—a mecca, even if its cheeses have long been sold at other shops. Whole Foods, which sells them too, has begun building showplace cheese-aging rooms—some under the guidance of Neal's Yard staff, notably at its long-anticipated first United Kingdom store, in Kensington.

Affinage was crucial to the cheese that captured my imagination: Oglesfield, made in Somerset by the Montgomery family, renowned for its cheddar. The milk for my new discovery came from Jersey cows, which the family keeps alongside its Friesians, the classic cheddar

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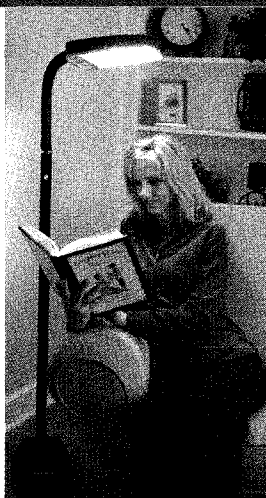
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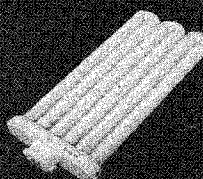
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cow. They had never used it for cheese. Jersey milk is unequalled for clotted cream, a Somerset speciality, and the cows are an amiable breed. But the milk is much less suited to cheesemaking: The large fat globules, marvelous in cream, deter proper setting, and the excess fat can detract from the desired texture in a hard, matured cheese.

At first Jamie Montgomery, the renowned cheesemaker in the current generation, made a Jersey cheese that Randolph Hodgson, the owner of Neal's Yard, nicknamed Montgomery's Lite—a blander, fattier version of the cheddar, which is famous for keeping its tang and deep flavors in exquisite equipoise. (Montgomery called it "Shield," for a shield found on the farm under a hill some believe to have been the original Camelot; he had the motif stamped at the bottom of wooden molds.) It struck Hodgson as too mild and too hard.

The Neal's Yard cheese whizzes went to work. Hodgson and William Oglethorpe, the master *affineur* of Neal's Yard, relentlessly think of ways to improve even already-great cheeses, like Montgomery cheddar. Hodgson regularly visits Somerset and selects his favorite wheels to bring back to the Arches, an aging cave he built under train tracks about a mile down the railway line from Borough Market.

Better to go soft, the team decided. Oglethorpe thought of raclette, a mountain cheese famous in Switzerland and France but almost unknown in England. Raclette is unctuous and pliable where cheddar is dry and crumbly. It seemed far better suited to Jersey milk. And introducing England's first artisan raclette might be just the way to celebrate Neal's Yard's 25th anniversary, which was coming up.

Swiss friends brought Oglethorpe a raclette machine (he collects cheese-making equipment on the side)—a grill-roisserie that continually melts the surface of a half-wheel of cheese. The oozing cheese is scraped over boiled potatoes and sometimes smoked ham (*racler* means "to scrape"). In the French Alps the dish is a cult, a street and country-fair food almost as popular as crêpes. Making it could be a jolly activity that

would give market-goers some lively fun and be a nice sideline too.

Oglethorpe hauled out the heavy artillery—resalting the Shield wheels, massaging them regularly, letting them sit for weeks in an unusually moist room. Jamie Montgomery took the hint. He decided to set aside a room just for aging, drawing inspiration from two Wisconsin cheesemakers he had recently visited: Willi Lehner, of Bleu Mont Dairy, who built his own cave, and Mike Gingrich, of Uplands Cheese, a maker of washed Goudas. He got hands-on advice from Marcel Petite, a renowned French *affineur* who sells Comté to Neal's Yard. (Comté is my new candidate to vie with Parmigiano-Reggiano as the world's greatest cheese; I've come late to the club, which seems to

Borough Market is a challenge. Everything about the raclette stand is good fun and hard work: washing and boiling some 175 pounds of potatoes, manning the heater, avoiding burns from dripping cheese. Lockwood, an amiable fellow, and Oglethorpe, a passionate eccentric who was raised in Zambia, cheerfully and sweatily do most of the work. Oglesfield comes into its glossy glory when it is melted, and it makes a marvelous bubbly glaze for anything gratinéed—potatoes, of course, but it would be ideal too for mac and cheese, the comfort dish to which whole books have lately been devoted.

Even more glorious is the Oglethorpe grilled-cheese sandwich, made with grated Montgomery cheddar heaped between slices of Poilâne bread, the

In the French Alps raclette is a cult, a street and country-fair food almost as popular as crêpes.

include every important cheese expert.) Petite pointed out that Montgomery's ventilation needed to change. The goal in an aging room, he said, is to get moisture into the cheese, not into the air; temperature and ventilation must go hand in hand with simple humidification. The collaboration between maker and *affineur* continued with such intensity that the cheese took on a new name to reflect it: Oglesfield.

England's own raclette has caught on with customers—but only very special friends get any to sell. In the United States, that mostly means Zingerman's, in Ann Arbor, Michigan, which has a decades-old collaboration and exchange program with Neal's Yard. It is also where the American-born David Lockwood, a partner and manager at Neal's Yard and the major-domo and co-owner of the raclette stand, began his career. For now, almost all the 40 wheels Montgomery can make in a month go straight to the raclette stand in London that Lockwood and Oglethorpe established as a separate business.

The lines start early on Saturdays, when just passing through the aisles of

French country bread that sets the international standard, along with five types of onion and a bit of garlic. I took one big bite and the sandwich immediately went onto my list of best things I've ever had.

The taste of that stellar sandwich fresh in my mind, I found aged Vermont cheddars at the conference to make it with, including Shelburne's own. I found, too, the only American artisan raclette, made by the Leelanau Cheese Company of Suttons Bay, Michigan, an area so scenic (as any visitor to Traverse City knows) that most of what it produces is sold to tourists and locals who visit its shop. John and Anne Hoyt, he from Detroit and she from a farm in France, met when John was working with a Swiss mountain cheesemaker. He learned techniques for the only cheese made there—raclette. Eleven years ago, the Hoyts started producing their own aged raclette. This year, it won the cheese society's grand prize. Leelanau Raclette is very good. So is Oglesfield. I wanted to take a wedge of each one home to (literally) toast the results of great transatlantic collaborations. ▮

Corby Kummer is an *Atlantic* senior editor.



CHEESE WHIZZES

Formaggio Kitchen, Cambridge, Massachusetts (www.formaggiokitchen.com, 888-212-3224), is as notable for its Italian and French candies and oils as for its cheese.

Artisanal (www.artisanalcheese.com, 877-797-1200) brought *affinage* on a large scale to New York City after Terrance Brennan and Max McCalman made the cheese course at Picholine (where Brennan was—and remains—chef and owner and McCalman was *maître d'*) a city legend. Now they age and sell cheese for restaurants and mail-order customers all over the country.

Zingerman's, Ann Arbor, Michigan (www.zingermans.com, 888-636-8162), is the national leader in educating apprentice cheese-lovers. Its co-owner, Ari Weinzweig, long ago formed a partnership with Neal's Yard Dairy, in England, and still gets the best selection of the cheeses it ages (and often transforms through aging).

The Cheese Store of Beverly Hills (www.cheesestorebh.com, 800-547-1515) has become a Los Angeles favorite. It is prized for its discoveries of farmhouse cheeses in both Europe and America, and the care it takes in presenting and selling them.

The Cheese Board Collective (cheeseboardcollective.coop, 510-549-3183) is a Berkeley institution that predates even Chez Panisse, which is directly across the street. Its members are owners and are unusually generous in their enthusiasm for the cheeses they all help to select and age.

CULTURE AND COMMERCE

Real estate may be as important as religion in explaining the infamous gap between red and blue states.

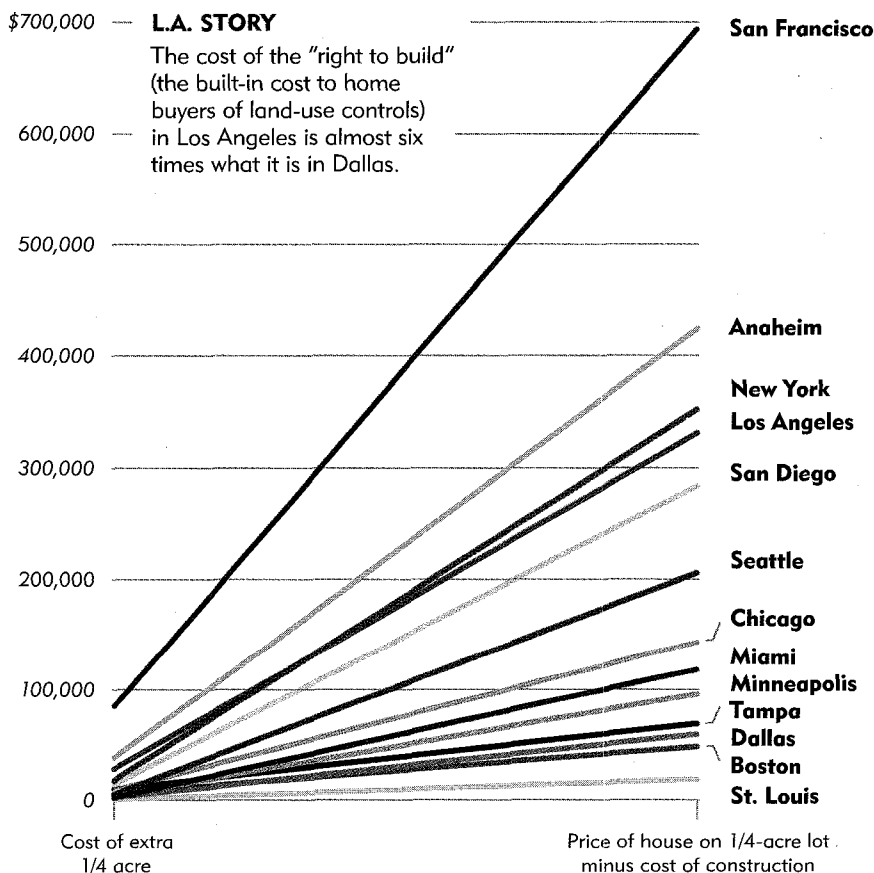
A Tale of Two Town Houses

BY VIRGINIA POSTREL

In 2000, my husband and I moved out of our mid-1970s three-bedroom town house in Los Angeles and into a brand-new three-bedroom town house in Uptown Dallas. At the time, the two were worth about the same, but the Dallas place was 1,000 square feet bigger. We've moved back to L.A., and we're glad we kept our old house. Over the past seven years, its value has roughly doubled. By contrast, we sold our Dallas place for \$6,500 less than we paid for it.

It's not that we bought into a declining Dallas neighborhood: Uptown is one of the hottest in the city, with block upon block of new construction. But the supply of housing in Dallas is elastic. When demand increases, because of growing population or rising incomes, so does the amount of housing; prices stay roughly the same. That's true not only in the outlying suburbs, but also in old neighborhoods like ours, where dense clusters of town houses and multistory apartment buildings are replacing two-story four-plexes and single-family homes. It's easy to build new housing in Dallas.

Not so in Los Angeles. There, increased demand generates little new supply. Even within zoning rules, it's hard to get permission to build. When a local developer bought three small 1920s duplexes on our block, planning to replace them with a big condo building, neighbors campaigned to stop the project. The city declared the charming but architecturally undistinguished buildings historic landmarks, blocking demolition for a year. The developer gave up, leaving the neighborhood's landscape—and its housing supply—unchanged. In Los Angeles, when demand for housing increases, prices rise.



Dallas and Los Angeles represent two distinct models for successful American cities, which both reflect and reinforce different cultural and political attitudes. One model fosters a family-oriented, middle-class lifestyle—the proverbial home-centered “balanced life.” The other rewards highly productive, work-driven people with a yen for stimulating public activities, for arts venues, world-class universities, luxury shopping, restaurants that aren’t kid-friendly. One makes room for a wide range of incomes, offering most working people a comfortable life. The other, over time, becomes an

enclave for the rich. Since day-to-day experience shapes people’s sense of what is typical and normal, these differences in turn lead to contrasting perceptions of economic and social reality. It’s easy to believe the middle class is vanishing when you live in Los Angeles, much harder in Dallas. These differences also reinforce different norms and values—different ideas of what it means to live a good life. Real estate may be as important as religion in explaining the infamous gap between red and blue states.

The Dallas model, prominent in the South and Southwest, sees a growing

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population as a sign of urban health. Cities liberally permit housing construction to accommodate new residents. The Los Angeles model, common on the West Coast and in the Northeast Corridor, discourages growth by limiting new housing. Instead of inviting newcomers, this approach rewards longtime residents with big capital gains and the political clout to block projects they don't like.

losing college-educated residents, on net, to other states, in large part because of the high cost of housing. Most of the South's population growth since the 1980s has come from the lure of cheap housing created by liberal permitting policies, according to new research by the Harvard economists Edward Glaeser and Kristina Tobio. By lowering the cost of housing, these policies give residents higher real

As a friend who recently moved from Manhattan to Santa Monica once said to me, "When people say a place is 'good for raising children,' that means it's boring." But not everyone with a taste for urban amenities can afford the superstar life. As the number of affluent Americans grows, the rich are bidding up the price of living in these special places, increasing the gap between the superstar cities and everywhere else.

People in these high-price areas respond that they have no control over housing costs. Everyone wants to live in California, and the land is already full of houses. This isn't Texas, with its miles and miles of empty old cotton fields. True, land is cheaper and more plentiful in less-developed parts of the country. But high-price areas could put many more units on the land they have. Research by Gyourko, Glaeser, and Raven Saks found that the lowest-density areas around expensive cities tend to have the *least* new construction and the *most* land-use restrictions. It's actually somewhat easier to build in more densely populated towns and neighborhoods—the opposite of what you'd expect if a shortage of empty land were the problem.

Some of the higher price of L.A. real estate does reflect the intrinsic pleasure of living there, as I'm reminded every time I walk out my door into the perfect weather. Some of the price reflects the productivity advantages of being near others doing similar work (try selling a screenplay from Arlington, Texas). All of these benefits—and the negatives of traffic and smog—are reflected in the price of land.

But what exactly is that price? Consider two ways of computing the price of a quarter acre of land. You can compare the value of a house on a quarter acre with that of a similar house on a half acre. Or you can take the price of a house on a quarter acre and subtract the cost of the house itself—the price of construction. Either way, you get the value of an empty quarter acre. The two numbers should be roughly the same. But they aren't. The second one is always bigger, because it includes not just the property but the *right to build*. Expanding your quarter-acre

FROM THE ARCHIVES

HELEN KELLER

I have often thought it would be a blessing if each human being were stricken blind and deaf for a few days at some time during his early adult life. Darkness would make him more appreciative of sight; silence would teach him the joys of sound.

Now and then I have tested my seeing friends to discover what they see. Recently I was visited by a very good friend who had just returned from a long walk in the woods, and I asked her what she had observed. "Nothing in particular," she replied. I might have been incredulous had I not been accustomed to such responses, for long ago I became convinced that the seeing see little.

"Three Days to See," January 1933

The direct results of these strategies are predictable: cheap, plentiful housing in some places, and expensive, scarce housing in others. A remodeler working on my L.A. town house a couple of years ago wistfully recalled visiting a cousin in Arlington, Texas, between Dallas and Fort Worth. He wanted to move there himself. In Arlington, he said, "you can buy a million-dollar house for \$200,000." According to Coldwell Banker's annual survey, a 2,200-square-foot, four-bedroom "middle-management" home costs around \$141,000 in Arlington (or, for big spenders, \$288,000 in Dallas), compared with \$1 million or more in the L.A. area. One man's million-dollar dream home is another's plain old tract house.

Many people do pack up and move, if not to Arlington, then to Las Vegas or Charlotte. Historically a magnet for educated migrants, California has begun

incomes compared with similarly paid workers elsewhere—a strong incentive to move, even if you don't like bugs or hot summers. The mobile middle class gravitates to the cities where housing is affordable. "If you're your basic \$85,000-a-year person, you can't own in Los Angeles. You can't do it," says the Wharton School economist Joseph Gyourko. And if you're your basic \$45,000-a-year person, closer to the U.S. median household income, you'd better pack for Texas.

That doesn't mean Los Angeles and San Francisco are in any danger of turning into Detroit and Buffalo. To the contrary, Gyourko calls them "superstar cities," places that offer "a rare blend" of stimulating leisure activities and a highly productive work environment. A life that looks "rushed" and "materialistic" to the folks headed for North Carolina feels exciting and creative to die-hard urbanites.

lot to a half acre doesn't give you permission to add a second house.

In a 2003 article, Glaeser and Gyourko calculated the two different land values for 26 cities (using data from 1999). They found wide disparities. In Los Angeles, an extra quarter acre cost about \$28,000—the pure price of land. But the cost of empty land isn't the whole story, or even most of it. A quarter-acre lot minus the cost of the house came out to about \$331,000—nearly 12 times as much as the extra quarter acre. The difference between the first and second prices, around \$303,000, was what L.A. home buyers paid for local land-use controls in bureaucratic delays, density restrictions, fees, political contributions. That's the cost of the right to build.

And that right costs much less in Dallas. There, adding an extra quarter acre ran about \$2,300—raw land really is much cheaper—and a quarter acre minus the cost of construction was about \$59,000. The right to build was nearly a quarter million dollars less than in L.A. Hence the huge difference in housing prices. Land is indeed more expensive in superstar cities. But getting permission to build is way, way more expensive. These cities, says Gyourko, "just control the heck out of land use."

The unintended consequence of these land-use policies is that Americans are sorting themselves geographically by income and lifestyle—not across neighborhoods, as they used to, but across regions. People are more likely to live surrounded by others like themselves, creating a more-polarized cultural map. In the superstar cities, where opinion leaders congregate, the perception is growing that the country no longer has a place for middle-class life. Yet the same urban sophisticates who fret that you can't live decently on less than \$100,000 a year often argue vociferously that increasing density will degrade their quality of life. They may be right—but, like any other luxury good, that quality commands a high price. ■

Virginia Postrel, an *Atlantic* contributing editor, is writing a book about glamour. Her blog, the *Dynamist*, can be found at www.dynamist.com/weblog.

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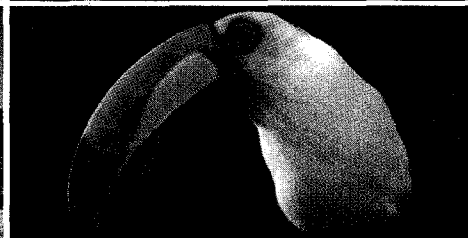
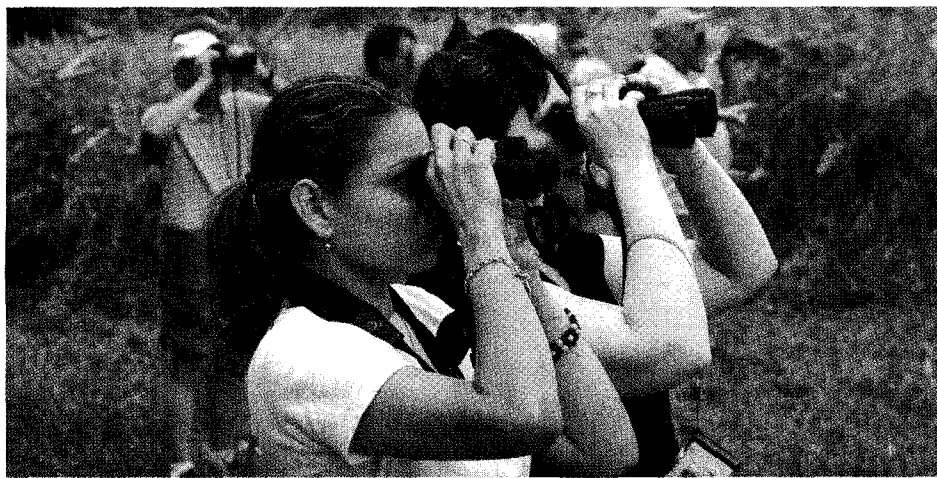
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CONTENT

Can celebrities survive the age of too much information?

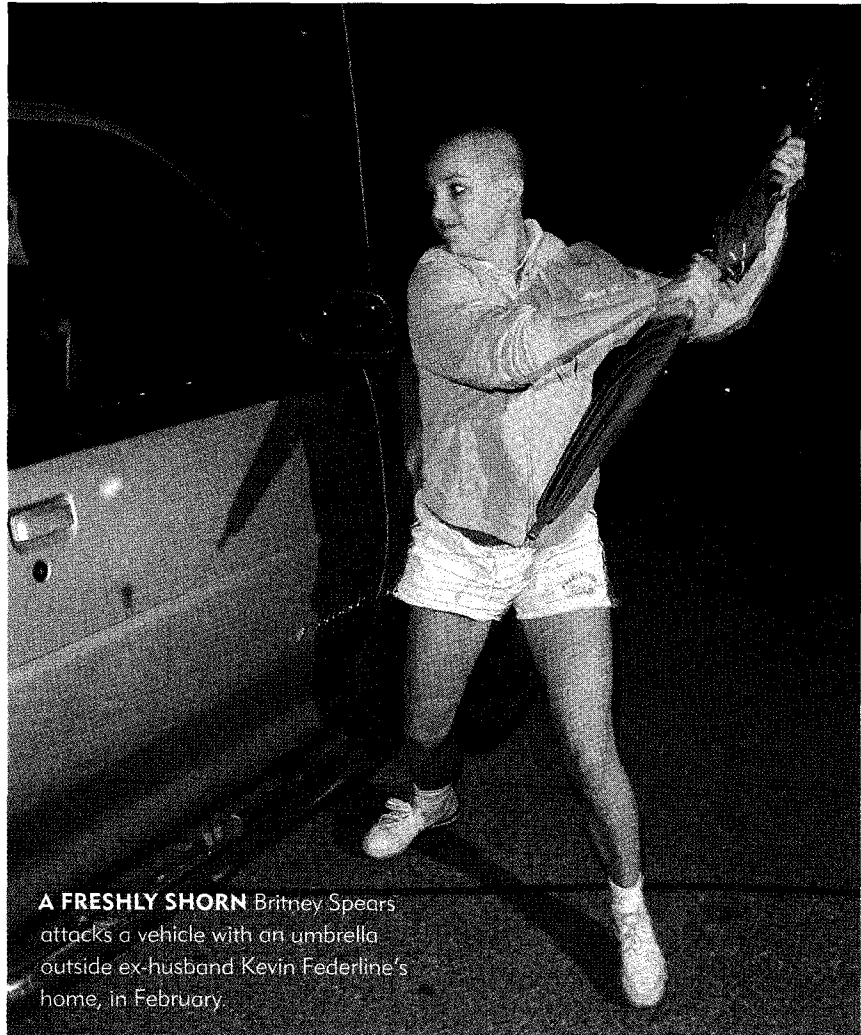
Falling Stars

BY MICHAEL HIRSCHORN

For more than two decades, Madonna was the consummate celebrity-image manipulator, a changeling nonpareil, a coolhunter's coolhunter. That is, until she agreed to perform at this past July's Live Earth concert, an all-star worldwide event designed to increase awareness about global warming. She had even written a song, "Hey You," expressly for the event.

A straightforward mid-tempo number, "Hey You" was proof, she must have felt, that her heart was in the right place. The lyrics boldly preached that purifying one's own soul can open the way to changing the minds of others, and the accompanying video was classic celebrity agitprop: a procession of glossy images of environmental devastation (fires, nuclear power plants, suffering animals), alternating with images of visionary leaders (Mandela, Aung San Suu Kyi, Gandhi) and current hacks (George W. Bush, Gordon Brown, Nicolas Sarkozy). The video culminated in an image of underdressed but nonetheless festive African children tossing a globe into the air, where it resolved into an image of the Earth seen from space. During her appearance in London, Madonna exhorted the crowd: "If you want to save the planet, I want you to start jumping up and down. Come on, motherfuckers! If you want to save the planet, let me see you jump!"

What was to have been a standard act of drive-by do-gooderism became a PR muddle, when Fox News revealed that Madonna's charitable foundation had invested in a host of ecologically offensive car, oil, and timber companies. Worse, the BBC subjected her to an "environmental audit" in which her carbon footprint was found to be roughly 100 times that of the average U.K. resident (six cars, nine homes, a global concert

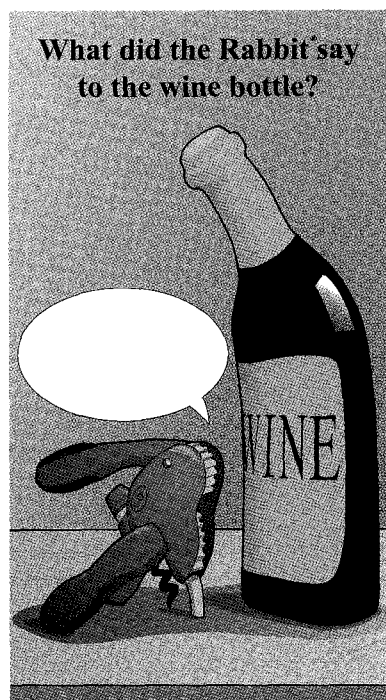


A FRESHLY SHORN Britney Spears attacks a vehicle with an umbrella outside ex-husband Kevin Federline's home, in February.

tour with at least 100 people in tow, etc.). Hordes of bloggers called her out as a hypocrite. And worse: Some began examining footage of the concert to determine whether the star's raging ax work during her performance of "Ray of Light" had been pantomimed.

When the master of the art of celebrity—someone who took on the Catholic Church, mainstreamed gay culture, more or less invented the now-common art of

voyeuristic celebrity peekaboo with her documentary *Truth or Dare*, then put out a book of high-end porn and got away with it all—missteps so publicly, you know something has changed. Indeed, can we, at risk of mock-epic portentousness, call this a moment of celebrity crisis? Going further, can we posit that the very idea of celebrity, which has held for much of the past century, is itself facing an unprecedented challenge, one that



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has turned actors and musicians and all-around famous-for-being-famous people from demigods into lab rats, to be momentarily toyed with by the public and then discarded once their narratives become tiresome?

Surely there has not been a more embarrassing time for celebrities. A remarkable portion of young Hollywood has been arrested or almost certainly will be arrested at some point. Lindsay Lohan, at 21 the most promising actress of her generation, may well have become uninsurable after a numbing series of arrests and stints in rehab, putting her career on the shelf for at least the near future.

Older stars have had their preposterously botched plastic surgery picked over by "experts" in weekly magazines, while their confreres' pill-popping, alcoholic antics are retailed in real time on blogs. Even Angelina Jolie, the queen of Hollywood, is apparently reduced to having her representatives plead with the public, via *People* magazine, to contemplate

some pictures in *L'Uomo Vogue* of Tom Cruise—taken by the photographer Herb Ritts—that showed him frolicking in the Malibu surf, his erect nipples poking through a half-wet tank top. Cruise was dogged even then by rumors of homosexuality, and the photos, which read as "gay," had been restricted by Cruise's publicists (in the analog age this was still possible) to European publication. Presumably this was because the international market was less interested in such issues or had a different signification system—perhaps in Italy, erect nipples are a sign of extreme butchness.

Regardless, precisely because Cruise's sexuality was in question, the photos were quite hilarious, and would certainly cause a ripple were one to appear on the cover of *Esquire*, itself a publication prone to strenuously restating its commitment to hetero-male values. Four months of negotiation ensued, during which the PR folks bartered the right to use a Ritts photo for various assurances

The public is still enamored of famous people, but now looks down at them instead of up—or at least sideways.

a history of Angelina photos purported to prove that she is not anorexic or suffering from a mystery disease, but in fact has *always been skinny*. And she *is too* still in love with Brad, despite what people say.

Blame, as always, digital media—underminer of newspapers, magazines, music, movies, and television—for eroding our traditional notions of celebrity. And *celebrity*, it should be said, is something distinct from acting or singing or doing. Celebrity is a state of pure fabulousness, in which one's aura is projected across the land, inspiring envy, fantasy, endless curiosity. But as the number of celebrities grows, and as their likenesses proliferate, their carefully constructed personae are increasingly disputed terrain.

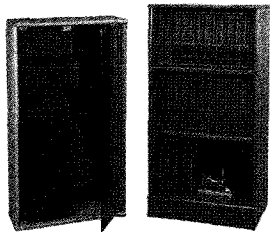
A story from the pre-digital era: When I was an editor at *Esquire* a bit more than a decade ago, I discovered

that the accompanying story would contain virtually nothing of interest to anyone. And because the gatekeepers for Cruise (only one of the firm's many A-list clients) knew that magazines lived or died as a result of favors granted or denied, they wielded their power ruthlessly. Victory, when it came in the form of permission to use a single photo on the cover, was so sweet that I rallied the entire staff to go out and celebrate. The story, needless to say, was a fluffer.

This image control, different in form but similar in kind to that exerted by publicists and moguls and producers from the dawn of the entertainment business, used to be key to sustaining celebrity. With breaches in the 1950s, which had its scandal rags, and in the '80s, when *Spy* magazine broke the cozy compact between celebrity and media, the

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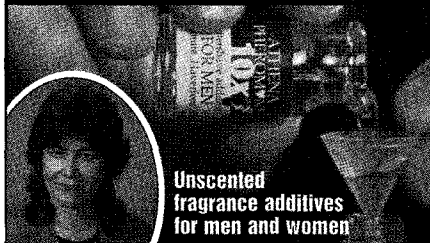
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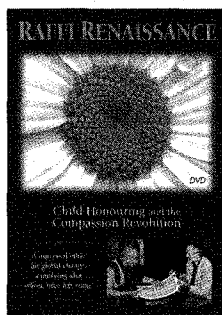
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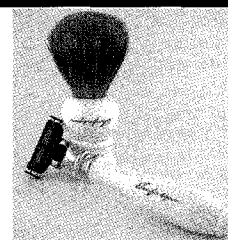
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control has always been top-down. Celebrities were manufactured, their brands honed by teams of marketers, then maintained through elision. The public never knew enough to truly understand, and hence judge, a celebrity, and therefore he or she could be described as "glittering," "larger than life," a figure of mystery and intrigue.

Now, of course, we have too much information: TMI. We are told that Britney Spears swam topless with her former assistant, that she ran crazed into a beauty salon and demanded to have her head shaved (the photos were online within hours), and that she feeds her two children ice cream and Doritos. Hollywood is besieged by wildcatting madmen on motorcycles swarming the city like locusts and capturing anything anyone of note does—preferably embarrassing, but mundane is fine, too. The more colorful content finds its way onto blogs like Perez Hilton, the Superficial, Pink is the New Blog, and the Time Warner-owned TMZ.com, which features unedited video of drunk celebs getting into fender-benders or pathetically rationalizing their inability to gain admittance to the club of the moment. The British weekly *heat*, which should be required reading for any student of the age, focuses surgically, preposterously, hilariously, on celebrity minutiae. A recent feature—pure tabloid genius—centered on shocking celebrity sweat stains. Other stories have homed in, titillatingly, on unbuff celebrity midsections, best and worst hindquarters, and the ugly knees of otherwise-hot celebrities. The less-shocking content, purposefully banal, finds its way into the U.S. category leader, *Us* magazine, which features a weekly spread showing that celebrities are "just like us."

Celebrities, we've now learned, *are* just like us. Probably no more attractive, now that you've seen them in *Star's* truly astonishing "Celebrities Without Makeup" issue; richer certainly, but probably not happier. The public—still enamored of famous people, but now looking down at them instead of up, or at least sideways—picks over the hideous fashion choices, the delicious quotes,

the overdoses, and the suicide attempts with the relish of hyenas tearing apart a wildebeest. The momentarily hot or fun celebs become fashion and lifestyle leaders, pushing trends (the Victoria Beckham bob is all the rage), but even this perch is tenuous. Once the meme has been propagated, the propagator is tossed aside, and must wait to be rediscovered by "the kids," à la Tony Bennett.

Being a celebrity isn't all terrible. Celebrities understand the power of branding, and they monetize their moment of fame as fast as they can, knowing that they could be swept away by the mildest shift in the cultural winds. Rappers, leading the culture here as in many other ways, have slapped their brands on everything from street wear to restaurants to beverages (50 Cent recently cashed in to the tune of \$100 million when the company that manufactures his Formula 50 Vitaminwater was bought by Coca-Cola). In the rock world, David Bowie famously became the first artist to float his future earnings to the public as a bond offering in return for a quick payday. Today's celebrities can sell off digital rights, international rights, gaming rights, and publishing rights, in ways celebs of yore never could. And who can blame them for doing so?

The most-successful entertainment figures are, in a sense, no longer celebrities at all, as they smartly rack up eight- and nine-figure fortunes behind a veil of normality that stymies the paparazzi. They live lives of conspicuous blandness, appearing in public as if to blend in with average suburbanites taking the kids to the supermarket. Will Ferrell, one of the biggest stars of the moment, recently was captured in *Us* out with his niece and nephew, wearing wrinkled clothes and a parti-color beard that would not have seemed out of place on a homeless man. Almost nothing is known about Matt Damon, Adam Sandler, or Steve Carell, all of whom, best we can tell, never go out and never do anything. Will Smith does go out to official events, but is almost never caught in mufti, managing to be seen only with his lovely wife and kids in tow. And Jennifer Aniston,

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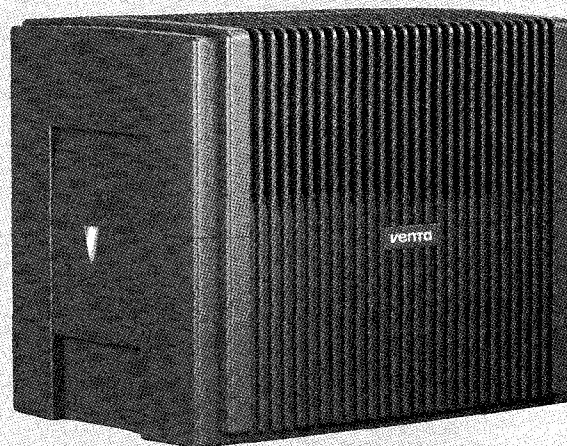
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late of *Friends* and Brad Pitt, has fashioned for herself a sob-sister role as the scorned woman. Twenty-million-dollar-a-movie stars: They're just like us!

As an entire generation of 20-something starlets gets swept away by instantly disclosed public displays of dissipation, older and wiser celebs plunge into charity work with a gusto that would make Mother Teresa proud. The non-anorexic Jolie—at 32 a survivor of a decade of tabloid drama around her marriages, bisexuality, and intimations of vampirism—has refashioned herself as a global ambassador for refugee issues.

It would be churlish, and probably wrong, to question the motives of the celebrities who flock to such causes, for

dolphin-related expertise, told a press conference. With charming modesty, he added, "I am really excited, but also a little nervous about this much responsibility—it is an actual job. There are responsibilities and commitments that I must make to be the voice of dolphins, whales, and conservation issues, and the expectations are quite large."

Or not. In the blogosphere, the announcement, accompanied by a photo of the fresh-faced Carter posing with an inflated dolphin, was treated with gentle mockery—and promptly forgotten.

The public now is too sophisticated, too cynical, to take a face at face value. Madonna had thrown herself about publicly with great abandon, secure in the

hypocrite than the rest of us, but she is guilty of misreading the new culture—perhaps, in her book, a greater sin.

The savvy celebs—and there are a few willing to venture the rewards that come from acting like a star in the Marilyn Monroe sense—understand that poking fun at the artifice of celebrity is now a prerequisite for being one. Justin Timberlake, like Nick Carter a veteran '90s boy-bander (in his case N'Sync), may be the only truly bankable star of the blogger era. He deftly melds old-school Rat Pack glamour with new-school multimedia omnipresence, talent, and taste. Unlike his more frantic peers, Timberlake makes no claims for himself (beyond "bringing sexy back"), which renders him blogger-proof; and he maintains a level of subtle self-mockery that suggests he's in on the joke, that he hasn't gone all Scarface with his fame. You can see him remaining a star into his 40s. Famously, Timberlake was duped in the first episode of actor Ashton Kutcher's MTV show *Punk'd*, in which fake IRS agents repossessed his house, cars, and dogs. He later got Kutcher back, mocking him on *Saturday Night Live*. Then, last Christmas, again on *SNL*, he delivered his coup de grâce: a "digital short" with cast member Andy Samberg called "Dick in a Box." Everyone goes on *SNL* to play at self-satire, but this was something new. The uncensored version (which NBC released on the Web) was a short-form work of genius, an unrelenting parody of precisely the kind of boy-band pablum Timberlake once inflicted on the public. Timberlake and Samberg, sporting ridiculous early-'90s facial hair, offered comically precise instructions, ripped from classically cheesy R&B via the boy-band hack book, on how a boxed penis is to be properly presented to a grateful lady. Timberlake played the skit straight-faced, even while prancing about moronically with a beribboned gift box affixed to his crotch. The video is now the sixth-most popular in the history of YouTube.

If you can't imagine Madonna doing something similar, that's precisely the point. ■

Michael Hirschorn is an Atlantic contributing editor.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

BENJAMIN R. BARBER

Just beyond the horizon of current events lie two possible political futures—both bleak, neither democratic. The first is a retribalization of large swaths of humankind by war and bloodshed: a threatened Lebanonization of national states in which culture is pitted against culture, people against people, tribe against tribe—a Jihad in the name of a hundred narrowly conceived faiths against every kind of interdependence, every kind of artificial social cooperation and civic mutuality. The second is being borne in on us by the onrush of economic and ecological forces that demand integration and uniformity and that mesmerize the world with fast music, fast computers, and fast food—with MTV, Macintosh, and McDonald's, pressing nations into one commercially homogenous global network: one McWorld tied together by technology, ecology, communications, and commerce. The planet is falling precipitantly apart and coming reluctantly together at the very same moment.

"Jihad Vs. McWorld," March 1992

who among us can say our altruism contains no self-interest? But the panic with which celebs scramble to "give back to the community" does yield some telling moments. In May, Nick Carter, of the Backstreet Boys, was appointed United Nations special ambassador for the Year of the Dolphin campaign. "People like Bono, Angelina Jolie, and Nicole Kidman have inspired me to put my celebrity to good use," Carter, who has no apparent

conviction that her every move—attending Kabbalah classes, adopting a Malawian child—would be accepted by her multigenerational fan base. But the digital era demands 100 percent authenticity, since inconsistencies between brand and reality can be easily parsed and exploited by legions of paparazzi and bloggers thrilled to take down someone who places herself upon a pedestal, who takes herself too seriously. Madonna is no more a

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ANDREW SULLIVAN & THE DAILY DISH

On Politics

"It's healthy to have an actual debate about foreign policy and conservatism. And I don't buy Ross's idea that the fundamental divide is between realists and idealists ..."

MATTHEW YGLESIAS

The Liberal Voice

"Indeed, my sense is that conservatives mostly regarded Clinton's misconduct in this regard as a kind of synecdoche (or maybe metonymy—sorry, Mr. Glassman!) for a failed presidency ..."

ROSS DOUTHAT

The Conservative Voice

"My sense is that the only people who were all that surprised by the Monica Lewinsky scandal were Clintonista liberals ..."

MEGAN MCARDLE

On Economics

"I understand that nearly all politicians believe that government expenditures are the acme of human achievement. Nonetheless, passing a budget seems like a rather low standard for gauging success in Iraq ..."

MARC AMBINDER

The 2008 Election

Fred Thompson's official campaign kick-off was high-tech, low-key, and well-produced. His speech, a sober disquisition on the country's perilous times in the context of Thompson's own record, was certainly not purchased from the deli ..."

JAMES FALLOWS

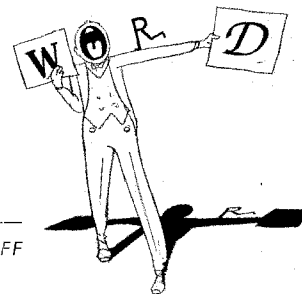
On Asia

"India and China are so fundamentally different in so many ways that it is amazing that Americans often talk about them as a twinned pair ..."

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

WORD COURT

BY BARBARA WALLRAFF



GERRY PERKUS, of Richardson, Texas, writes: "My wife, a Texan, and I, a New Yorker, have been engaged for some time in a dispute about the word *pocketbook*. I have always used *pocketbook* when referring to what she insists is a *purse* or a *handbag*. She avers that *pocketbook* is completely inappropriate, since her purse is not a book that she carries in her pocket. Can you help us resolve this?"

Ah, but what is a *pocket*, really? The word's Anglo-Norman predecessors, *poket* and *pokete*, referred to a small bag. Originally, a *pocket* was more general-purpose than a *purse*, which was intended to hold money. Eventually—in the 1500s or thereabouts—pockets began to be "sewn into or on clothing, for carrying a purse or other small articles," according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

Pocketbook didn't come into use until the 1600s, but almost as soon as it did, it was used to mean, among other things, "wallet," or "money holder"—pretty much what *purse* originally meant, though by this point *purse* had acquired additional, general-purpose senses. The *OED*'s earliest citation for *purse* as something that would tend to belong to a woman, however, is dated 1955; its citations for *pocketbook* in this sense date back to 1830. Perhaps you should remind your wife that she doesn't need a *pocket* to have *pocket money* nor a *suit* to pack a *suitcase*. *Pocketbook* is in the same, um, *bag*. It's a perfectly good word—maybe even a better word for her than *handbag* if she, like me, slings the thing over her shoulder.

KENNETH LIPMAN, of Beverly Hills, Calif., writes: "There is a trend in the sciences toward dropping the *-al* suffix for adjectives. For example, *psychological* becomes *psychologic*, *geological* becomes *geologic*, and *biological* becomes *biologic*. When is it correct to use these new forms?"

Actually, none of those words is truly new—all six appear in my *Webster's New*

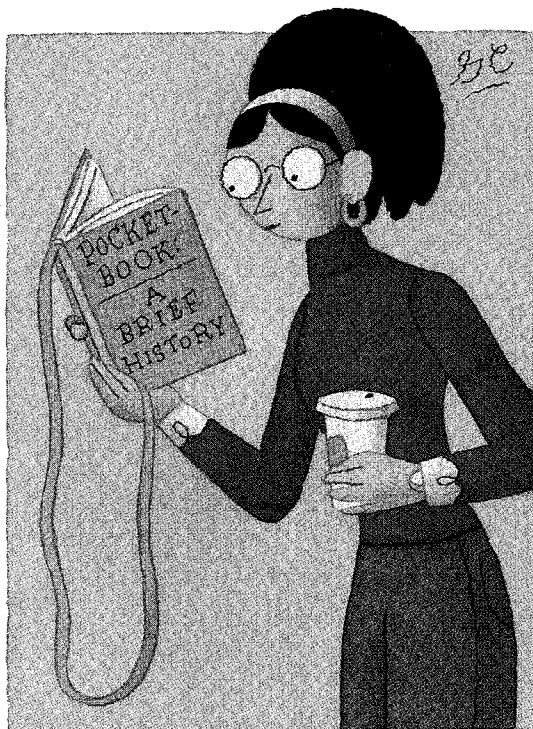
economic and *economical*—are distinct, with distinct meanings. That's all to the good. "Every well established differentiation," Fowler wrote, "adds to the precision and power of the language." But he also argued that "when two forms coexist, and there are not two senses for them to be assigned to, it is clear gain that one should be got rid of." Fowler wasn't suggesting we choose either *-ic* or *-ical* and use it across

the board. Rather, he was recommending we consider undifferentiated pairs with an eye to what "appears to be the winning side."

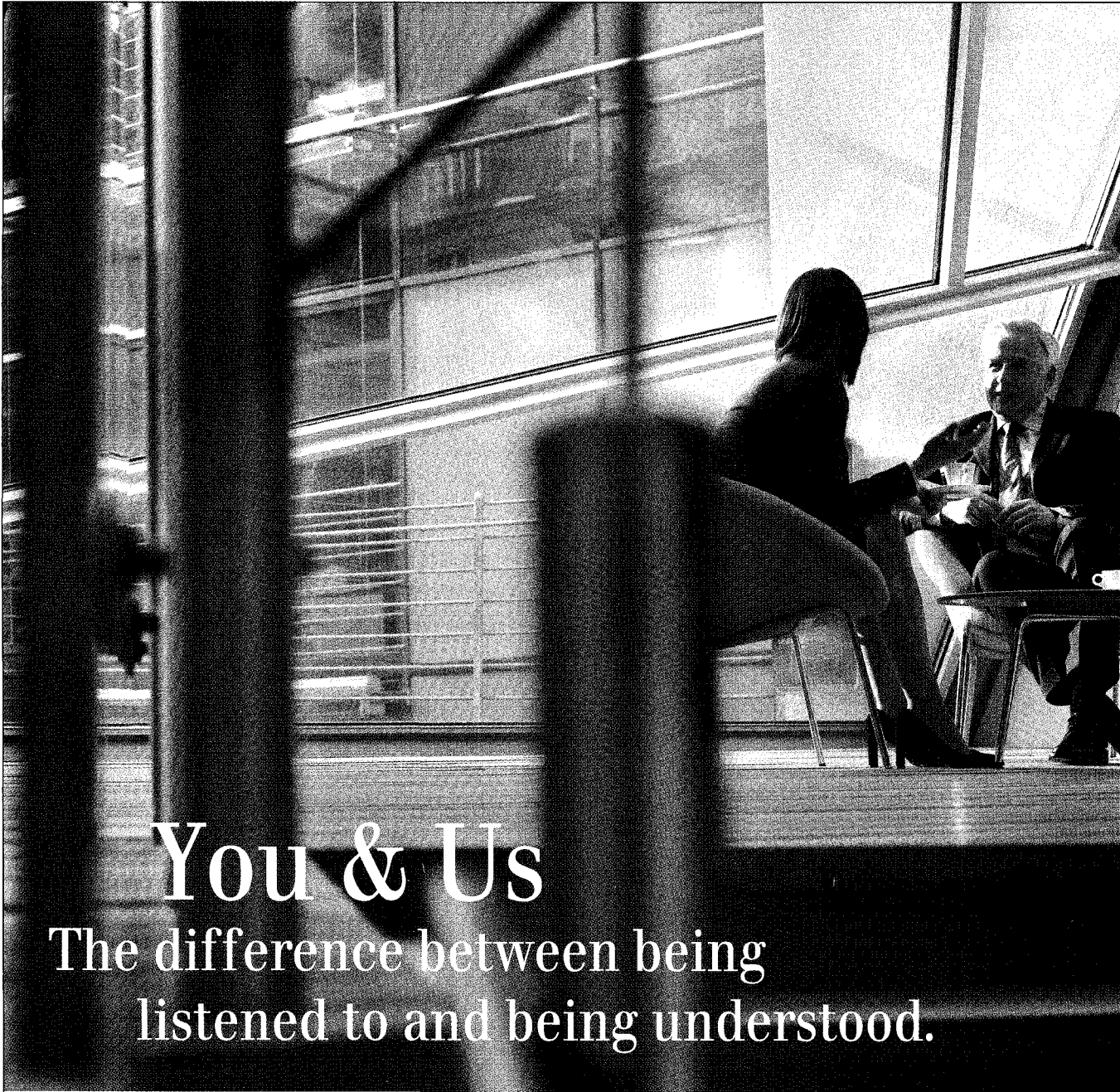
So let's do that. Determining the winner is much easier now, in the Internet era, than it was when Fowler had to read stacks of newspapers to search for evidence. *Psychological* is so far out ahead of *psychologic* that the latter is hardly worth talking about. Similarly with *geological* and *geologic*. If the U.S. Geological Survey ever changes its name, get back to me. But *biologic* does have a differentiated sense—not that it's always used this way. It properly means, as *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* defines it, "a biological product (as a vaccine or blood serum) used in medicine." Today we have *biologic mesh*, employed in surgery, and *biologic drugs*. *Biologic agents* are good; *biological agents*, the weaponry of biological warfare, are bad. Thus the word *biologic* is a rare thing: a once-useless variant whose time has come.

Do you have a language question or dispute? Write to Word Court in care of The Atlantic Monthly, P.O. Box 67375, Chestnut Hill, MA 02467, or send e-mail to msgrammar@theatlantic.com. All letters become the property of Word Court. Ms. Grammar is also on the Web, at www.theatlantic.com/courtrecord.

GREG CLARKE



International Dictionary, second edition, from 1954. Nor are questions about *-ic* and *-ical* pairs new. H. W. Fowler wrote about them incisively in his 1926 *Dictionary of Modern English Usage*, though most of the specific words he considered—such as *casuistic* and *casuistical*, *diabolic* and *diabolical*—don't trouble us anymore. As Fowler pointed out, the words in some pairs—for example, *politic* and *political*,



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